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GRANTLEY MANOR.

**PARIS. — PRINTED BY FAIN AND THUNOT,
Rue Racine, 23, near the Odeon.**

GRANTLEY MANOR.

A TALE.

BY

LADY GEORGIANA FULLERTON,
AUTHOR OF "ELLEN MIDDLETON."

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA



PARIS:

PUBLISHED BY A. AND W. GALIGNANI AND Co.,

N° 18, RUE VIVIENNE.

1847.

10. 11. 1911
11. 11. 1911

GRANTLEY MANOR.

CHAPTER I.

It had rained all day. Towards five o'clock the sun was making a desperate effort to shine for a moment before his final disappearance behind the grassy hill which rises in front of Grantley Manor. A heavy mass of clouds, just tinged at the edges by a line of purple light, was slowly rolling along the sky, overhanging the Abbey Woods, Heron Castle, and the ridge of muirland which extends far up the valley of the Grant. The red maples and the yellow beeches in the park wore their gaudiest autumnal hues, though many of their bright-coloured leaves were strewed on the grass beneath, or floated down the rapid stream, as it made its way through the valley to a tide river, some twenty miles further to the south. A fine November day has an indescribable mildness peculiar to itself, a calm and mournful beauty which pervades the soul, and soothes it into a deep tranquillity. On the day and at the hour of which I am speaking, two persons were standing together by the stone balustrade which separates the flower-garden of the manor-house from the park beneath it. One of these was an elderly woman, whose set features and vacant gaze might have indicated either a total absence of thought, or an absorbing preoccupation. She seemed to be either pensive or sleepy. By her side was a girl half-sitting, half-leaning, on the parapet; her slight and graceful figure was wrapped in a fur pelisse, which hung about her in heavy folds, her arms were crossed on her breast, her eyes sometimes fixed on the ground, sometimes raised towards the road across the park, and then hastily withdrawn. Now and then she

snatched a China rose from the bush beneath her, and scattered its leaves about with reckless profusion.

Margaret Leslie was a beautiful girl. Her eyes were of that peculiar colour which varies from iron-grey to the deepest violet; her nose was small and aquiline, and her mouth admirably formed, but slightly curved downwards at the corners, so that when she did not smile there was something perhaps not quite agreeable in its expression, but the smile was so enchanting and so frequent that there was hardly time to miss it before it beamed again in all its brightness. Her eyelashes were black and long, and her hair fell, not in stiff ringlets, but in rich brown flakes round her white and slender neck. As she watched the flying rose-leaves, and vainly attempted to guide their descent into the basin of a small fountain under the terrace, her narrow delicately pencilled and arched eyebrows contracted into a frown which might have kept in order anything less unmanageable than flying rose-leaves. Indeed to expect that they would not blow about in the breeze which was just getting up as the sun sank behind the hill, was sanguine; but Margaret's expectations were rather apt to be unreasonable. For instance, she was at that moment almost provoked that Mrs. Dalton, her governess, did not perceive by a kind of intuition that she was tired of watching for the travelling carriage which according to her calculations ought to have brought her father to the gates of the avenue an hour before, and which had not yet made its appearance.

"Really, dear Mrs. Dalton," she said at last, "I cannot stay here any longer. As my father is not yet arrived, I am sure he will not come in time for dinner."

"My dear, it is only six o'clock."

"How short the days are getting, then! What a blazing fire they have made in the hall!" Margaret exclaimed, as she threw open the entrance door.

"Is Mr. Sydney arrived?" she inquired as she crossed the billiard-room, and rolled the balls about in an impatient manner.

As they tumbled headlong into the pockets, she said, half aloud and half to herself,

"I shall never love my father as much as Walter Sydney!"

"Oh, but my dear you ought," suggested Mrs. Dalton.

Margaret turned suddenly round, and while she untied the strings of her black lace bonnet, and pushed back from her cold cheeks the curls that hung heavily about them, she replied,—

"When will you learn, dear Mrs. Dalton, that *you ought* is no argument at all?"

"When will *you* learn, Margaret, that *you ought* should be the most powerful argument in the world?"

It was not Mrs. Dalton who had ventured on this reply. It was made by one who always spoke the truth to Margaret, and from whom she was always willing to hear it, for she loved and respected Walter Sydney, and had often been heard to assert that he was the only person she knew who made the truth agreeable, and on this particular occasion she was so glad to see him, that even had the remark displeased her, she would still have held out her hand to him as she passed through the room. After closing the door, she opened it again, and said to him with a smile,—

"If you knew the subject of our dispute, you would not, perhaps, have taken Mrs. Dalton's part. But you always think it right to assume that I am in the wrong."

He shook his head, but she was gone; and he heard her on the stairs and in the passages, carolling away like a bird on the wing.

This Walter Sydney was a man of about thirty-five or thirty-six. He was tall and thin; his complexion sallow; some might have thought that there was beauty in his pale high forehead, in the lines of his face, and in the expression of his eyes; but the awkwardness of his figure, and a want of ease in his manner, generally destroyed that impression, and the usual remark of those who saw him for the first time, was, "What a strange-looking man Mr. Sydney is!" To Margaret Leslie he had always appeared the personification of goodness and of wisdom, and she looked up to him with the strongest affection. He had been very intimate with her father from an early age. Heron Castle, the grey turretted house which stood in the midst of what were called the Abbey Woods, on the hill opposite to Grantley, was his father's place, and he and Henry Leslie had been friends and companions from the days of their boyhood. Leslie was the older of the two, and when Walter, a shy and awkward youth who had been entirely educated at home, and who, with a passionate love of study, had an insuperable dislike to new scenes and new associates, joined him at Oxford, he welcomed him with a warmth and a joy which excited the surprise of his own gay and dissipated friends.

Before his first departure for Oxford Henry Leslie had determined in his own mind to marry his cousin, Mary Thornton, a gentle

quiet girl, whose father was the clergyman of the village, and who had been his and Walter Sydney's constant companion ever since they could remember. He had called her in play his little wife, and she had taken it so much for granted that they were to be married as soon as they were old enough (for he had told her so whenever they had parted with fresh tears or met with fresh joy at each successive holidays), that when he, one day, seriously asked her if she would indeed be his wife, she looked at him with unaffected surprise. Their engagement seemed to her only the continuation of a state of things to which she had never anticipated any interruption; their relations approved, their friends congratulated; they corresponded during the university terms and spent the vacations together at Grantley. They sat in the gardens, they strolled in the woods. He taught her to ride, and she sketched for him his favourite hunters. He made her read Walton's "Angler;" and while he fished she sat patiently for hours by his side, holding in her breath lest she should frighten the trout away. In the autumn many a time did she walk across the turnip-fields to meet him, and to hear how many brace of partridges he had killed, and how well Juno had pointed; and on many a misty morning in winter did she ride on the white pony he had given her, to see the hounds meet and to watch for the distant view-halloo! In the evening they sat in the old library and examined together the map of his estates! She learned the name of every village, and planned new roads and new plantations. They retired to the billiard-room that he might knock the balls about, and make all sorts of hazards before her wondering eyes; or to a recess in the drawing-room, that he might conquer her at chess; or to the pianoforte to sing together sundry duets, while Walter Sydney, then a shy and silent youth, laid down his book and listened; and his mother (who, having found nothing but disappointment in her own marriage, watched a love-affair with that tender interest which the sight of happiness, understood but not experienced, awakens in a gentle and subdued spirit) invariably grew absent at whist and revoked; an enormity which her husband justly resented, though he bore it in his own opinion with truly angelic patience, only suddenly, putting down his cards, and saying in a mild impressive manner—

"Pray, Mrs. Sydney, may I be allowed to ask, *are* you playing at whist, or *are* you *not*?"

This produced a start, a readjustment of the spectacles on her nose, and a renewed attention to the game, coupled with the eja-

culatation "Dear children! They seem made for each other!" And so these dear children seemed to think, for they troubled their heads singularly little about any one else.

And thus the course of their true love ran on as smooth as if Shakespeare had not pronounced against the existence of such a case. And their's *was* true love, in spite of Shakespeare, in spite of approving parents, in spite of the easy channel which favourable circumstances had wrought for it. True happiness it *was* when on a lovely summer's day Henry Leslie and his bride went to the village church and pledged their faith to each other in the eyes of their delighted families and of a rejoicing tenantry; when the bells rang their loudest peal of joy, and heartfelt acclamations rent the air, as they walked down the narrow pathway towards their home.

And there was happiness in that home, for they tasted that bliss of paradise, which alone, Cowper says, has survived the fall. Neither temper nor neglect shed one bitter drop into their crystal cup: while it lasted, it was unimpaired and pure. A child was born to them, the Margaret of our story, and when she was carried to the village church and the sacred waters of baptism poured on her infant head by the same hand which had joined theirs in marriage, Mary looked at her husband, and in that look there was perhaps too much happiness for this world of ours. Two years later a grave was dug under the yew-tree in the old church-yard, and to it was conveyed all that remained on earth of the blooming bride, of the young mother, of the Mary who had so often played as a child on that spot, and who had chosen it herself for her grave, when a few days before her death, supported by her husband, she had reached the place where their first words of love had been spoken and where she now wished to be buried, that he might never look upon that view or sit under that tree without a thought of her

"Who in her spring-time died."

At her request no boasting inscription, no pompous memorial was placed on her tomb; the date of her birth, of her marriage, and of her death, and a simple stone cross alone marked the spot. Henry Leslie had flung himself on the ground in an agony of grief on the day of her funeral, and when Walter Sydney spoke words of comfort to him, he shook his head despairingly, and bade him be silent, for life had lost for him all the bright hues with which youth and hope had gilded it. Truly had he loved his wife, and truly had he

mourned for her ; but what is true is not always deep, and what is vehement is not always lasting. After many days had come and gone his grief grew calm ; and then new hopes and interests arose, and other joys and other pains, and various alternations of misery and of bliss visited him in the course of fifteen years which he spent partly in Italy, partly in the Peninsula where he served as a volunteer, and subsequently in long voyages by sea and land. Meanwhile there was one at home who visited, day by day, the grave where the friend of his childhood and of his youth was buried, and who gathered and treasured up in secret the spring-flowers that grew there ; and there was one blooming flower which he watched with unremitting love and care. Walter Sydney's affections were few and deep ; for the child of Henry and of Mary Leslie he would willingly have laid down his life. Much as his books and his writings usually absorbed him, there was no day and no hour, that he would not lay them gladly aside, if a merry peal of laughter summoned him to his window to welcome a little horsewoman proudly mounted on her Shetland pony.

Henry Leslie had left his child in the care of his parents at Grantley ; both had died during his absence, and Margaret had been entrusted to Mrs. Dalton, an old-fashioned governess, whose plans of education were superintended by Mrs. Thornton who was established at the vicarage, and by Walter Sydney, in whom Leslie had more confidence than in any member of his own family. It was lucky for the little girl that such was the case, for, an only child, an heiress, and a beauty, she ran considerable risk of being utterly spoiled, if Walter had not watched over her with a father's care and a brother's tenderness. He soon discovered in her character those impetuous qualities which are equally powerful for good or for evil according to the direction which they take. The overweening indulgence with which she was constantly treated, had at least, among many evils, one good result ; Margaret was the truest of human beings, and from the moment that she first lisped a few words in baby language, no falsehood had ever passed her lips. There was no moral courage in this ; it was the result of a frank and fearless nature, and of an education which, though it had not sufficiently checked the bad, had not impaired the good impulses of her character. There was no merit in it, I repeat ; but it was beautiful—as a bright day, as a clear sky, as a pure lake are beautiful ! It was something fresh from the hands of God and unspoiled by man : and often when Walter gazed into the child's

blue eyes, or parted the curls which clustered on her fair open brow, the words of commendation which our Lord pronounced on Nathanael rose to his mind, and he would murmur, as he pressed the little girl to his heart, — “One in whom there is indeed no guile.”

As she grew older, and became conscious of thoughts which her grandmother and her governess could not comprehend, and of capacities which they knew not how to direct and therefore strove to stifle; like the unskilful husbandman who would dam up the stream he knows not how to turn; she went to Walter, and to him she revealed them in language which he understood, for genius has a simplicity of its own which appreciates and is appreciated by the simplicity of childhood. When she first perceived that religion meant something beyond going to church once a week, and repeating the catechism by rote, that poetry was not merely verse-making—that conversation was not always mere talk—that life was not child’s play; when its forms and its spirit—its realities and its mysteries—appeared to her in a new shape, and with a strange power; it was again to Walter that she turned, and from him that she learned glorious truths which give to our destiny a meaning, and to our actions an end. He gave her books, and while he carefully guarded her mind from what might taint, he filled it with high thoughts and noble images. Self-sacrifice in every form was the theme of his lessons, the object of his reverence; and Margaret listened with a kindling eye and a flushing cheek when he recited deeds of heroism, and lauded acts of self-conquest, the real true courage of the soul; when he spoke of the honour due to the martyr who dies for his Faith, to the patriot who bares his breast to a thousand foes, to the missionary who confesses Christ with the scalping-knife before his eyes, to the Sister of Charity who braves the horrors of pestilence in the loathsome abodes of disease; and lastly, not least, to those lonely martyrs—to those unnoticed confessors—to those meek souls who in the humble walks of life, in desolation unrepining, go through a fiery trial, with no witness but that God,

“Who to the wrestlings of the lonely heart,
Imparts the virtue of His midnight agony.

He taught her that self-denial practised in secret, and pangs endured in silence for conscience’ sake, no less deserve the palm of martyrdom than the courage that carries a man to the scaffold or the stake. He illustrated his meaning by various examples; he called

her attention to those heroic actions which are sometimes performed by the poor with such sublime simplicity, such unconscious magnanimity. For instance, he made her read and compare the historical record of the noble answer of Louis XII. of France, when in the presence of an applauding court, he pronounced that sentence, which has been handed down to an admiring posterity, "It is not for the King of France to avenge the injuries of the Duke of Orleans;" with the police reports of an obscure trial in the newspaper of the day, in which a poor collier bruised and disfigured by a cruel assault, begged off his brutal enemy all punishment, and refused all pecuniary compensation, simply urging that the man had a wife and children and could not well spare the money, and that he would himself take it as a great favour if the magistrate would *pass it over*;¹ and he asked her if the monarch's deed was not of those that have indeed their own reward on earth, and the collier's did not number among those which are laid up as treasure in Heaven—there, where the rust of human applause does not dim, and the moth of human vanity does not consume their merits, and forestall their recompense? The virtues of the poor!—Their countless trials!—Their patient toil!—Their sublime because unknown and unrequited sacrifices! History does not record them. Multitudes do not applaud them. The doers of such deeds travel on their weary journey through life, and go down to their graves, unknown, unnoticed, though perchance not unwept by some obscure sufferers like themselves; but a crown is laid up for them, there—where many first shall be last, and many last shall be first! Wearied creatures who after working all day with aching heads perhaps, or a low fever consuming them, creep out at night to attend on some neighbour more wretched than themselves, and carry to them a share of their own scanty meal. Mothers who toil all day, and nurse at night sickly and peevish children. Men, who with the racking cough of consumption, and the deadly languor of disease upon them, work on, and strive and struggle and toil, till life gives way. Parents whose children cry to them for food when they have none to give. Beings tempted on every side, starved into guilt, baited into crime;—who still resist, who do *not* kill, who do *not* steal, who do *not* take the wages of iniquity, who do *not* curse and slander—and who, if they do *not* covet, are indeed of those of whom "the world is not worthy." And *we*—*we* the self-indulgent—*we* the very slaves

¹ See a similar example in a trial in the *Times*. September 1844.

of luxury and ease—we who can hardly bear a toothache or a sleepless night; *we* go among the poor, and (if they are *that* to be which, must require a higher stretch of virtue than we have ever contemplated) give them a nod of approval, or utter a cold expression of approbation. They have done their duty, and had they *not* done it, had they fallen into the thousand snares which poverty presents, had the pale mother snatched for the famishing child a morsel of food, had the sorely-tempted and starving girl pawned for one day the shirt in her keeping, stern Justice would have overtaken them, and Mercy closed her ears to their cries. And if they have *not* transgressed the law of the land, but for a while given over the struggle in despair, and sat down in their miserable garrets with fixed eyes and folded arms, and resorted to the temporary madness of gin, or the deadly stupor of laudanum, then we (who into our very homes often admit men whose whole lives are a course of idleness and selfish excess), turn from them in all the severity of our self-righteousness; and on the wretched beings who perhaps after years of secret struggles yield at last—not to passion, not to vanity, but to *hunger*,—with despair in their heart and madness in their brain,—we direct a glance, whice we *dare* not cast on guilt and depravity when it meets us in our crowded drawing-rooms, in all the pomp and circumstance of guilty prosperity!

Such were Walter's thoughts, such were his sympathies; and though he seldom declaimed on the subject, he felt deeply, and acted accordingly. His influence over Margaret was great, but it affected her way of thinking more than her mode of life. He could inspire her with a love for what was great and good, but it is only by a course of patient and diligent training bestowed on a child, or resolutely practised in after-life by ourselves, that we learn not merely to feel but to do; not only to admire but to imitate.

It is not to be imagined that because Margaret's mind was naturally formed to admire what was heroic, and had been trained by Walter to appreciate the true heroism of patience and self-denial, that at the present time of her life she was either a heroine or a model of self-control. His lessons and his example were so far useful to her, that they presented to her mind an ideal standard which prevented her from looking upon her own character and habits with the complacency which she would otherwise have indulged; for it must be confessed, that whereas at times her heart beat high at the ideal glories of Joan of Arc or the Maid of Saragossa, at others it beat with a very hurried pulsation at the least appearance of danger threatening

the pretty Mistress of Grantley. It must be owned, that though her eyes would fill with tears at the account of two Sisters of Charity setting out on foot from Paris in one of the coldest winters of this century to go and nurse the sick at Barcelona, and never leaving the afflicted town till the plague had passed away, she was apt to shut herself up for days together in her comfortable boudoir, with her little feet on the fender, and her graceful figure reclining in the softest and most luxurious arm-chair, because it was too cold, or too wet, to venture out to the cottages or the school, and that Mrs. Dalton going alone would do just as well, especially as her grandmamma was so afraid of her catching cold. I wish that it was not on record that Margaret had been heard to declare on other occasions, that there never was such nonsense as her grandmother's fancies about her catching cold.

It is true that she read with enthusiasm the lives of St. Elizabeth of Hungary, and St. Margaret of Scotland—those loveliest of women, those gentlest of saints, daughters of a royal race, and the brides of heroes—who with their own hands attended upon lepers, and nursed with a mother's tenderness those from whom their own mothers turned with disgust; but it is unfortunately equally true that she could hardly bring herself to visit Mrs. Jones, an old woman in the village whom Walter had particularly recommended to her notice, because her room was intolerably close, and that she was apt to show her the wound in her leg.

It is true, that as she heard the account of Mrs. Fry's first visit to Newgate, when, quietly shutting the door behind her, she advanced alone, the Bible in her hand, among the fierce and reckless women who at that time were controlled only by armed men, and addressed them as sisters and as friends, in those tones and with that expression which none can conceive who have not heard her, and which those who have can never forget—it is true, that as she listened, her heart burned within her, and she longed to go and do likewise; but at the next opportunity of exercising courage, of conquering disinclination, of enduring pain, or overcoming weariness, these high resolves and noble projects were apt to vanish into air, or to swell that amount of "good intentions" with which St. Bernard tells us that Hell is paved. The fact must be confessed, Margaret was a spoiled child.

Mr. and Mrs. Thornton, who were perfectly unlike each other in every other respect, concurred in one line of conduct, that of indulging and flattering her to the utmost extent. He was one of

those gentle, kind-hearted persons, who can see no imperfections in those they love, and though not himself deficient in understanding, would praise his wife's singular good sense, and Margaret's extraordinary docility, in a way which severely tried the patience of his old friend, Mr. Sydney, Walter's father.

Mrs. Thornton was a good woman; nobody could deny *that*; but to her goodness she joined a profound conviction of her own wisdom; a steady, simple-minded conceit, which carried her through every circumstance of life with an amount of self-gratulation, and through every conversation with a degree of authoritative folly, that was inexpressibly amusing. She was unboundedly credulous and had a habit of adopting opinions put forward by others as her own, and of maintaining them dogmatically, in happy unconsciousness of their incompatibility with those she had herself advanced a quarter of an hour before. She was never startled at anything, never surprised, never puzzled, by the grossest inconsistencies or embarrassed by the most direct evidence. Between her and Mr. Sydney there was a close alliance, joined to a little tacit enmity. She kept him in a state of mingled irritation and amusement. There never was any occasion of meeting, whether at dinner, luncheon, picnic, or party, that she was not by his side, pouring into his ear oracular sayings, political axioms, mysterious predictions, theological denunciations, and scientific discoveries, to all of which he responded by a short sudden laugh, or if she looked for further encouragement, by an assenting growl. On the subject of education, Mrs. Thornton adopted in turn the most contradictory theories, but they succeeded each other so rapidly that they usually evaporated in talk, and as nothing ensures success so much as fixity of purpose, Margaret's very fixed determination *not* to be managed, outlived all the systems of management which her grandmother successively adopted.

Mrs. Dalton, when she first came into power, had made an effort to establish her authority, but the attempt had so signally failed, owing to the steady resistance of her pupil, seconded by her grandmother's unequivocal support, that poor Mrs. Dalton was forced to strike her colours, and abandon the unequal contest, contenting herself in future with a display of power which was rather agreeable than otherwise to Margaret, who treated her governess somewhat as the subjects of a constitutional monarchy treat their sovereigns, professing humbly to obey them, as long, and just as long, as their will is in perfect accordance with their own.

Having thus attempted to give some notion of our heroine's character, education, and position in life, we will now turn to the library, where, after some hours of vain expectation, the party, assembled to welcome Colonel Leslie's arrival, were about to break up for that night.

"Another day of expectation! another day of disappointment!" exclaimed Margaret, as she held out her hand for the candlestick which Walter was lighting for her on her way to the door. "Is it not extraordinary that my father does not come or write?"

"It is indeed," answered Walter. "When you left him in town, he told you positively that he would be here yesterday. Did he not?"

"Yes, to be sure he did and actually held out his finger to me at parting. Do not look angry, Walter! You know how anxious I had been to see my father; with what joy I heard the news of his arrival after this long absence, and with what impatience, what emotion, I hastened to meet him in London. During the tedious hours of the journey I had but that one thought. During the night we stopped at Newbury, I never closed my eyes—listened to the striking of each hour, and longed for daylight; and when we reached London, when we dashed through the streets, I could hardly sit still; and when I arrived—(I shall always hate that hotel)—'Colonel Leslie was out!' 'Gone out for a walk!' I sat down alone in that square odious drawing-room, and waited—waited two hours! and then he came in—"

"And was not his manner kind then?"

"Oh dear, yes! very kind. Nobody is ever unkind to me. Dr. Bartlet, or Lord Donnington, when they call here, are very kind. Come, Walter, do not let us deceive ourselves. I have never had a thought I have not told you, and I must e'en out with it. My father does not care a straw about me, and the sooner I make up my mind to it the better. I shall be a dutiful daughter to him, at least I'll try," she said, quoting the burden of an Irish song she had just been practising, and smiling though two big tears were rolling down her cheek.

"This is unreasonable, dear Margaret," said Walter. "You had worked yourself up into a state of romantic excitement about your father's arrival, and pictured in your own imagination a scene that was not realised; and because poor Leslie's manner is naturally quiet—"

"Is *your's* so very vivacious?" interrupted Margaret, with rather a saucy expression.

"Oh, mine! Mine is the manner of an old dog, who cannot help wagging his tail when he sees those he loves."

"O Walter! dearest Old Walter! I wish you were my father."

A strange expression passed over Walter's face, but he answered:

"Well, I cannot say I do, for I should then deprive Leslie of a treasure which I am sure he values; and you do not know, Margaret, how much I love your father."

"Not more than *me*?"

Walter looked as if he could not very well love anything more than the beautiful little creature before him, but he shook his head, and said:

"Come, come, Margaret, you must be contented to give way to others. You are too fond of the *first place* everywhere."

Mrs. Thornton joined them while Walter was speaking, and instantly took up the cudgels for Margaret:

"And so she should be; she has always been brought up to it; and who should have the first place among us, if it is not Margaret? As to your vexing yourself, my dear, about your father's not being glad to see you, it is foolish, really very foolish, because—"

"I did not say he was not glad to see me," interrupted Margaret, with a heightened colour, for she did not always bear with patience her grandmamma's animadversions.

"But, my dear, how should he be glad to see you? It is only by proving people that we learn to love them," and she glanced at Walter with a glimmering notion that that last phrase had been in his line; "I never loved my children when I did not know them."

"And when was that?" asked Margaret, somewhat captiously, for it must be confessed that her temper was a little ruffled that day.

"When they went to school, my dear, I always said to my boys, 'Now, my dears, I have done with you; I have nothing more to say to you. No school-boys ever care for their mothers, so I wash my hands of you. Don't talk to me till you are grown up; don't let me hear of you; don't come near me!'"

"I do not remember," remarked Walter, "that John and Eustace obeyed your instructions. They seemed to me to stick close enough to you during the holidays."

"Oh, they never minded a word I said to them," replied Mrs.

Thornton. "I always was a cypher, a nothing, a nonentity to them. They would follow me about because I gave them sugar-plums, but they did not love me, they did not care for me; there was no link between us."

Again she glanced at Walter, for that last expression had been decidedly poetical, and this time it was not lost upon him, for he smiled, as he again presented the candlestick to Margaret, and was about to reply, when the sound of carriage wheels, the barking of the dogs, and the loud ringing of the bell, announced the arrival of Colonel Leslie to his home after ten years' absence. The doors were flung open, two dogs rushed in, Margaret stepped forward, Mrs. Thornton looked flurried; Mr. Thornton, whose gout prevented his rising as rapidly as he could have wished, stretched out his hand, while on his fine open venerable face a joyous smile said "Welcome," better than any words would have done. Walter looked graver than usual. Colonel Leslie kissed Margaret on the forehead, shook hands with Mr. and Mrs. Thornton, and then wrung Walter's in silence. And then there followed one of those spaces of time which are spent by every person present in trying to look very happy, and to feel happy, while they can hardly resist the consciousness that they are extremely uncomfortable, and yet that it is imperative not to suffer themselves or others to think so. Colonel Leslie, indeed, did not seem to think it necessary to make much effort. He sat down in an arm-chair and poked the fire. Mr. Thornton smiled, took snuff, cleared his throat, and then asked him (how difficult to find a question to put to a man whom you have not seen for ten years) if he had had a pleasant journey. Mrs. Thornton, who seldom allowed anybody to answer a question for themselves when she was present, took the words out of Colonel Leslie's mouth, by asking him in return, "How could it be a pleasant journey, my dear? How can you expect a man, who has travelled all over the world like Leslie, to see anything to admire at home in our poor little country?"

"Why, my dear Mrs. Thornton," blurted out her husband, who had through life persevered in reasoning with her, a practice which other people had generally dropped, "you might as well say that Leslie would have no pleasure in seeing us all again, because he has been used to a set of queer foreign-looking faces."

There was a dead pause; somehow or other this last speech seemed to have disconcerted Colonel Leslie, and Mr. Thornton to have felt the moment that he had uttered it, that it would have been

better left unsaid. This redoubled the embarrassment of the whole party. Margaret, whose cheek had been deepening in colour ever since her father's arrival, felt it was quite incumbent upon her to speak. First she looked at Walter, but he had sat himself down by the fire, his long face longer than usual; his long legs extended before him, beyond what appeared their natural size, and his eyes fixed on the fire as if they would never look on anything else again. At last by some happy inspiration she seized on the front paws of one of the fine dogs which had come in with her father, placed them on her knees without any regard for her white muslin gown, and said timidly as she glanced at Colonel Leslie. "What a beautiful creature this is, papa!"

He started as if from a reverie, looked attentively at her, sighed deeply, and by a sudden impulse held out his hand. Margaret seized it, drew near to him, and from that moment a considerable thaw took place in the general aspect of things. Tea was brought in for the second time, and Walter, who had perceived the affectionate look which Leslie had cast on his daughter, and the renewed expression of pleasure in those eyes in which he could never bear to see a cloud, shook off his oppressive gravity. He and his friend began to talk of their former haunts and old acquaintances; Mrs. Thornton, who, like the canary birds, always chirped the louder when others conversed, was encouraged to hold forth again in her usual tone; and her husband slowly recovered from that painful shock, the consciousness of having said the wrong thing at the wrong time. And now we must, in another chapter, explain why Mr. Thornton's remark had better not have been made, and how it came to add to the embarrassment of the assembled family at Grantley Manor.

CHAPTER II.

A short time after the death of his wife, Henry Leslie had left England in order to travel for a few months in Italy. The change of scene, and the excitement of the journey, to a man of twenty-three, who had never before been out of his own country-town, soon roused him from the depression which had driven him from his home to seek health and amusements abroad; and by the time he had travelled through France, and spent a few weeks at Turin and at Milan, he was just in that state of mind and of feelings which most readily admits new impressions. The acuteness of grief had subsided, and a vague desire for fresh interests and new excitements had taken its place. A latent taste for painting and for poetry, for the artistic and imaginative side of life, took strong possession of Leslie's fancy as he advanced into Italy. The influence of its brilliant skies—the magic of its natural beauties—the memories of the past—its departed glory and its living charm—operated more and more powerfully on his soul; and for the time being the quiet English country gentleman was transformed into a passionate admirer of that strange land whose very name is a spell; whose very defects are attractions; where desolation is bewitching; suffering poetical, and poverty picturesque; where life resembles a dream—where the past is almost more tangible than the present—where an eternal vitality springs from the bosom of perpetual decay, like pure flowers floating on the surface of a dark and stagnant pool; life in its brightest and most glowing colours—death in its most poetical and soothing form, meet each other at every turn. With her cloudless skies and her tideless seas—the unchanging gray of her olive groves—the brilliant hues of her mountains and of her streams—the solemn silence of her cypress groves—the noisy throngs of her joyous people—her gorgeous churches, with their myriads of living worshippers—her gigantic tombs, with their countless multitude of unknown tenants, Italy is at once and emphatically the land of the living and the land of the dead. This Leslie felt; he did not seek society—he did not enter into noisy

amusements—he left his hours and his days to take their natural course—he floated down the current of life, while Nature and Art unrolled before him visions of beauty and scenes of enchantment which appear to those whose souls they touch, not as novelties, but as the realisation of a presentiment or of a dream. Have we not, some of us, in our hours of sleep, known a land, a spot, a home, which in our dreams we recognise—which, in our waking hours, we sometimes long to visit again? Have we not at times, in performing the commonest actions of life, in opening a book, in shutting a window, in meeting (for the hundredth time perhaps) with a person, experienced a sudden strange unaccountable feeling, which suggests to us, in what appears a supernatural manner, that we have done *that* action, thought *that* thought, met *that* person in the same manner before, and yet the whole impression is independent of the memory, and is more a sensation than a thought? Such was the effect that the first sight of the Campagna of Rome produced upon Leslie; he had lingered at Genoa and at Florence; he had become thoroughly imbued with the order of ideas and of taste which creates in men a sort of new sense and new perceptions. I dwell much upon that change in the whole intellectual being which is caused by a series of impressions and associations which, but a short while before, were as strange to the mind they visit as colours to the born blind, because it partly accounts for the sudden fancy which soon after took possession of Leslie's feelings.

As he was standing one morning on the steps of the church of St. John Lateran, and gazing on the view before him, he exclaimed, half aloud: "This is Rome, indeed! I recognise her here!"

A young man, who was sitting on the steps with a drawing before him, heard these words, looked up, and while a bright sudden Italian smile flashed on his dark countenance, without speaking he nodded assent. This silent gesture made them acquainted, and a few words passed between them. This young man was a painter, and as Leslie glanced at his work he was struck with the extraordinary talent which it evinced. The vague, mysterious, melancholy beauty of the Campagna; the contrast between the brilliancy of its colouring and its utter desolation; was so truly rendered in the hasty sketch before him, that, pointing to it, he said in bad Italian but with a smile:

"And this, also, is Rome!"

"Ah, not more like Rome," exclaimed the young artist, "than the creations of man are like the works of nature! What I can do

with *these*," he added, holding up his palette and his brushes, "is so unlike what I see *there*, (pointing to the Campagna), or *here*! (touching his own forehead). It is a great pain to conceive vividly, and to render faintly!"

This was said so earnestly and unaffectedly, that Leslie instantly felt inclined to like and to know more of the young painter. Words sometimes affect us in a singular manner. A phrase, a sentiment which we may often have heard before, at times unaccountably arrests our attention; touches, perhaps, some chord which, by a remote and scarcely perceptible vibration, reaches our own heart, and by a kind of magnetic power instantaneously produces sympathy between us and the speaker. In this case it may have been that the Italian's melancholy and passionate love of his art, the disproportion which he simply expressed in a few words between the creations of his fancy and the work of his hands, answered to the feelings of one, who like Leslie, under a cold and quiet manner, hid a keen sensibility and a lively imagination. To be a poet in the very depths of his soul, and to find no words in which to give life and form to the thoughts which struggle within him; to feel the might of genius and the strength of inspiration; to be conscious of the fire which consumes him in secret, and to have no mould in which to cast the burning torrent; to feel the sacred flame dying away for lack of air and light to make glad or mournful music in his secret soul, and never hear with his outward ears one note of those mysterious melodies vibrate through the air; to feel that he can love with passion, or thrill with indignation, while his voice is mute, his hands weak, and his eyes dim, is a pain that has, probably, been experienced by many a shy and silent man; one whom the wayfaring man and the fool, the babbler of many words, or the scribbler of many pages, has passed by with indifference or gazed at with contempt; and it is to such as these that one word, one look, comes sometimes with a strange power, and unlocks in an instant the flood-gates which have been closed for years.

The acquaintance which had commenced on the steps of St. John Lateran soon ripened into intimacy. Leslie's fiery and poetic nature, which the quiet round of domestic duties and interests and the mild light of an early and unthwarted affection had not roused, now sprang into existence, or rather became conscious of its own strength, and in Leonardo Ferrari he found a companion whose character and tastes were at this moment exactly suited to his own. He was an enthusiast and an artist. At once indolent and eager,

simple in his character, and impassioned in his language, he was a true Italian. In his romance, there was a nature; in his passion, a simplicity; in his eyes, a fire; and in his manner, a languor which characterises that nation, and seems a type of that country, which one of their poets so mournfully addresses—

“Deh, tu fossi men bella, o almen più forte,
Ond’ assai più ti paventasse o assai
T’amassi men.”

For two months Leslie and Leonardo spent such days together as can be spent in Rome alone. Among the ruins of departed glory, scattered as natural ornaments among the fairest and most fantastic scenes that nature ever created; among the relics of a stupendous human power; amidst the memorials of a divine and eternal faith; in the catacombs, those dark palaces of the glorious dead; in the matchless arena, where the blood of martyrs has washed away the foul stains of heathen idolatry, and the image of the Dying Gladiator fades before that of the Saint who yielded his body to the lions, and committed his soul to his God; in the aisles of St. Peter’s, in the galleries of the Vatican, in the gardens of the Villa Doria, they wandered together. Many a lonely church, many a deserted villa, many a silent pine-grove they visited in the twilight hour; and in the day Leslie was often in the studio, where Leonardo worked with that religious devotion to his art, which belonged more to a past than to the present era, and recalled the days when an artist seldom seized a pencil to trace on his canvas the image of our Lord, of his blessed mother, or of the saints, without first kneeling to pour forth his soul in prayer. Leslie learnt Italian, and for the first time read the sublime works in that language, as he sat on the broken marble sarcophagus, which formed the garden-seat of Leonardo’s studio. A few flowers grew in that court—a small fountain played in the centre, and two imprisoned birds sung their wild notes over his head. The Italian sun shed its intense light on the walls of the studio, and Leslie’s eyes often wandered from his book to the canvas, to which the artist was transplanting one of his mental visions. The subject he had chosen was the resurrection of Jairus’s daughter, and into this picture the painter had thrown his whole soul: there was but one figure in it, that of the maiden rising from the bed of death. The expression of her face, her attitude, told the story (if one may so speak) better than if the figures of our Lord, of his apostles, of her parents, and of the scoffers who in

that solemn hour became believers, had been also depicted; and imagination portrayed them more vividly, perhaps, than if the hand of the artist had designed them. The countenance of the little maiden was so holy—there was at once such awe and such serenity in the expression of those large eyes, which an instant before had been closed in death; a vague regret for the vision that was flown—a dawning joy for the life that was regained: on her brow the seal of another world, whose threshold she had passed; on her half-opened lips, a welcome for that to which she was restored;—that as Leslie gazed on this picture day after day, his imagination was more and more captivated by its divine and its earthly beauty. He thought that he had never seen anything so fair in form, or so angelic in expression, as the maiden of Leonardo's design.

One day that he was seated in his favourite retreat and reading the "*Gerusalemme*," he had just paused after that line which forms the touching conclusion of Clorinda's history, "*Passa la bella donna e per che dorma.*" He fixed his eyes on the strip of deep blue sky which stretched over the narrow court, and mused in silence over the incomparable beauty of that passage. He was startled from his reverie by an exclamation of Leonardo's, who, with folded arms, was contemplating his canvas:

"Not so beautiful—not so holy as *her* face, by one half!"—And he broke his brush into pieces, and threw the fragments into the court, where they fell at Leslie's feet, who picked them up with a smile at this impassioned manner of venting a moment's discouragement, and inquired who the ideal might be that could throw into shade the creation before them.

"Do you not know?" said Leonardo; "my sister, Ginevra, of course. *That* is her portrait, but it is not really like her. There is more soul in one look of her eyes, more thought in her pensive brow, more love in the expression of her mouth, than ever Raphael or Domenichino painted; and what can I do? Alas! I wish sometimes that I had never seen her, or that she was not so beautiful. It makes me hate my pictures!"

"And break your brushes," observed Leslie, as he collected the pieces; "but I am sorry, Leonardo, that that design of your's is a portrait. I have always disliked that practice of introducing living persons into ideal scenes, especially where the subject is religious."

"But what," cried Leonardo, "what is so religious as Ginevra's face? You have never seen her at her prayers?"

"Never anywhere," replied Leslie, with a smile. "I wish I had."

"I have sometimes gone to the church of San Giovanni, when the rays of the setting sun have been pouring a rich flood of light through the painted windows of the choir, at the hour when she kneels at the altar rail to say her evening prayer. O, Leslie, I have gazed upon her, till I have been frightened at the halo of light which has played about her brow, and fancied that she might be translated from earth to heaven in a sudden extasy of devotion. Alas! that I should not have been glad! It reassured me to see the golden lights round Mother Agnese's ugly head. I knew *she* would not go straight to heaven, whatever Ginevra did!"

"Where does your sister live?" asked Leslie.

"At home in Verona," replied the young artist.

There is something in the sound of *Verona*, which, to an Englishman, is at once familiar as a household name, and romantic as the very dream of a poet. It speaks to the imagination as Italy does; it touches the heart like the haunts of our youth. Nature, architecture, the associations of history, the traces of the middle ages, and of the glories of Lombardy adorn it on one hand; and on the other, genius has made it our own, and has thrown over it a spell which can never be broken as long as Englishmen read Shakespeare, and glory that *his* language is their mother tongue, and *his* great name compatriot with their own. Leslie was twenty-three; he had gone through a period of happiness and a period of grief which had taught him what both were, without, in either case, reaching the highest intensity of which these feelings are susceptible. He had grieved, and his heart had been softened; his grief had passed away, and his imagination had been excited. He had passed through scenes, he had studied a language, which had roused all the dormant romance of his nature; and he had not lost the habit which characterises Englishmen at all times of their lives, more especially if they are only sons and heirs to large fortunes, of doing what they please, how they please, and when they please; and all these circumstances being taken into consideration, it will not, perhaps appear very surprising, that on the day that followed this conversation in the studio, Leslie and Leonardo, in a little open britska, were flying over the Campagna in the direction of Bologna, and with the ultimate intention of visiting Verona. Leslie had evinced a sudden wish to see Juliet's tomb and Capulet's house; still more, perhaps, to become acquainted with the original

of the picture he had so long watched and admired ; and when he proposed to Leonardo to accompany him, and to take this opportunity of visiting his family, his purpose was confirmed by that indescribable Italian smile, so unlike anything which ever flashes across a northern countenance, (as different from our smiles, as their sun is to our sun), but which anybody may witness who will give a penny to the first little Italian he meets in the street : it will shine on his poor face, through all the dirt and depression of poverty, as the glorious sun through the smoke and the fog of a London atmosphere. Be that, however, as it may, it is certain that Leonardo smiled, that Leslie was delighted, and that after a few days spent at Bologna, they crossed the plain of Lombardy in the night, and arrived at Verona early in the morning. The Piazza delle Erbe at Verona, is certainly one of the most enchanting scenes in the world, especially at eight o'clock in the morning, on a sunny day in May. It combines all that the imagination can combine, to make a market-place beautiful to the eye. Think of whatever has charmed you most in the quaint, angular, richly-ornamented architecture of the middle ages—think of forms and projections, of contrasts in colours, which are at once startling and harmonious—think of fountains throwing out of their marble mouths torrents of sparkling water—think of heaps of gigantic carnations and gorgeous hyacinths, such as you seldom see but in Dutch pictures, lying about in wanton profusion, and exhaling odours which might, indeed, make

“ The light wings of Zephyr wax faint with perfume.”

Think of picturesque groups of dark-eyed women, with their white mezzaros and their coral necklaces, holding out to you bundles of these flowers. Turn from them and glance down the street which opens on the market-place ; fix your eyes on a small wooden balcony—for it is the balcony of the Capulet House, and the Capulet crest surmounts the doorway—the form of Juliet rises before you as you gaze, and a voice in your ear seems to whisper the very words of Romeo.

Then think of the torrents of light, of the golden splendour, which the Italian sun sheds on those fantastic buildings—on those bright waters, on those gorgeous flowers—those dark-eyed women. Think of the busy hum of men, of the rapid glances, of the wild smiles, which give life to that magic scene, of the romantic asso-

ciations which make your own heart beat at the name of Verona; and then say, whether to arrive there, on that very Piazza delle Erbe, on a delicious morning in May, was not enough to make Leslie exclaim with Italian enthusiasm and English earnestness—

“There is no world without Verona’s walls.”

Ginevra was more beautiful than Leonardo’s design; no canvas has ever borne the semblance of so lovely a creature; no poet’s language has ever described the passionate languor of her dark eyes; no sculptor’s hand ever moulded a fairer form than hers; the wavering and broken lights that flit on the surface of a stormy sea, are not more varied than the gleams which passed over her face as hope and joy, passion or tenderness, love or scorn, animated her faultless features. When Leslie first beheld her, she was standing under the portico of the villa where Leonardo had preceded him, and holding her brother’s hand in hers, she extended the other to him, while she said, in that tongue the very sound of which is music—

“Oh welcome, to you who have recalled the bloom to his cheek, and the light to his eye. He needed sympathy and you gave it. Your’s shall be the blessing of those who carry the cup of cold water to the lips of the weary traveller. You will stay with us. Will you not, Leonardo’s friend? We have no English comforts,” she continued, changing her earnest manner into a playful one, and glancing at the deserted looking building near which they stood, “but our sun and our orange-trees, uncle Francesco’s books, and Leonardo’s love shall do what they can, and *your* kindness the rest,” she added with an increased softness of accent, and a glance from under her dark eyelashes which seemed to ask for something more than kindness; and yet Ginevra was no coquette. She was innocent as the child who crowns her head with flowers, and then laughs in the joy of her heart, as she sees herself in the glass; pure as the swan who curves his white neck as he skims over the water, or the gazelle, who turns her large dark full eye upon you as you pass, for she was as careless of her own beauty as the laughing child, and

“Not the swan on the lake or the deer in the vale”

where more guiltless of a plan or of a design than the niece of Father Francesco, the priest of Rouere, the sister of Leonardo the painter. But her eyes spoke in a way which none but those ga-

zelle-looking eyes can speak; the bright colour in her cheek rose and fell with bewitching rapidity, as Leslie told her tales of other lands beyond those snowy Alps on which they gazed from the orange-gardens of her home; she learned English, which in her little mouth grew soft as her own skies, and she taught him Italian, which in his became the very language of passion; and when under the shade of an elm-tree they read together the charming romance of Luigi Porta, he thought her the very ideal of the Italian Juliet;—when he surprised her one morning at break of day as she stood leaning against a broken column, and holding her empty basket out to show a clamorous crowd of beggars that her store of provisions had come to an end, he almost wished himself one of those beggars who kissed the hem of her garment, and called her saint and angel. Thus, day by day, in every hour, in every action of her life, in each conversation in which she poured forth the bright and pure thoughts of an ardent but guileless mind, and the high aspirations of an eager spirit, he discerned a goodness and a nobleness which answered to the vision his soul had formed of her whose image had rivetted him in Leonardo's studio: when, in the daily tenor of her life, he saw exemplified that simple type of pure religion, and undefiled, which St. James in a few short words describes: "To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world:" then, to the passion which had sprung up in his heart, was joined a reverent and intense admiration, which subdued and hallowed its nature; but when, with a strong effort, he once spoke of England and departure, Ginevra turned as white as the marble of Carrara which her brother was chiselling, and when Leslie hastily retracted the words, the pomegranate in her hand was pale by the side of her cheek—all this flashed one day on the kind but stern guardian of the orphan girl. Father Francesco, with severe tenderness, bade her shut her ears to the flatteries and shun the presence of the stranger, who knelt not at the same altar as themselves, and who talked of love and not of marriage to his Ginevra. She obeyed; and Leslie saw the silent struggle of a passion, strong as life, but not stronger than conscience; and he who had watched, followed her, lived in the light of her dark eyes, who had ceased to care for aught on earth but her smiles and her tears, or to fear anything, but the loss of the idol he had enshrined in his heart with all the impetuosity of his nature, which had never brooked check or control,—he determined, at all risks, to make her his own.

After a few months, into which were crowded the agitations of a life, during which he had to conquer the opposition of Father Francesco, the scruples of Leonardo, and the objections of his own parents; once, to part from Ginevra when insurmountable difficulties seemed to stand in their way; another time, to rush back to her side only just in time to prevent her taking the veil; after fears, hopes, anguish, terrors, emotions, and joys, which made this second era in his life as different from the first as a canto of Dante's from a scene of Metastasio, he became the husband of his beautiful Italian bride.

He was again happy for a time, happy, at least, as far as the present moment went. Ginevra was all in all to him; he loved her with that wild idolatry which makes human passion a fearful thing, which seems like the desperate gambler's stake of his whole fortune upon one throw, a garnering up of the soul in one object, a concentration of all the feelings on one sole point. He remained in Italy; he spent a winter at Rome, a summer on the Lake of Como. He could not bear to transplant his beautiful Southern flower into the blighting atmosphere of the North, or expose her to the cold reception which he knew the prejudices of a hostile family could not but procure to her, and it was well that he did not! They *had* their bliss: two years of married love: two years spent among nature's fairest scenes: two years of undivided trust, and daily intense happiness: is not that a great deal of bliss for one man's life? Must not *such* bliss as that decay? Had it not better cease abruptly, than slowly wither?

I am unwilling too early in my story to dwell on scenes of gloom, and this is only a retrospective sketch of Colonel Leslie's life. He was once more left alone with a child, another girl, two or three years younger than his little English Margaret. One of those sudden and malignant fevers which make such havoc of human life had carried off in a few days Leslie's second wife, and her last words were to entreat him that her child might be placed under the care of her own relations and brought up in her own faith. Leslie religiously complied with this request. This great catastrophe, this second overthrow of the happiness of his life, did a great and sudden work upon him—the work of years. It sobered, perhaps it hardened him. No one exactly knew in what spirit he bore it. He solemnly consigned his children to their respective families, and then he went to Spain and to India. He grew stern in manner; some said, heartless in character—cold he certainly was: none knew him well,

and few liked him. He is now returned to his home, and we have seen his first arrival there after ten years' absence. His second marriage, though well known at Grantley, had never been openly talked of or acknowledged among the members of his own and his first wife's family. It had ever been an unpleasant topic, a forbidden subject. When Margaret was a very little girl she had once heard Mrs. Thornton whisper to Mrs. Sydney, after her father had been named,—

"My dear Mrs. Sydney, since that sad Italian affair, I have never been able to feel as if he belonged to us, or would ever really be at home with us again. I have quite a horror of Italians."

Margaret, who had not the least conception what an Italian was, took an opportunity on the following day of asking her governess what her grandmamma had meant by "that sad Italian affair," and why she had such "a horror of Italians?"

"Mind your book, and don't ask foolish questions, Miss Margaret," was Mrs. D.'s judicious though not satisfactory answer. When in time Margaret learned more about Italy and Italians, she was still more puzzled, but took every opportunity of talking upon the subject; because, as she observed to one of her little friends :

"When I do so, every body makes a face; grandmamma purses up her mouth, and gazes at the ceiling; Walter frowns and looks at his boots, and grandpapa strokes his chin and begins humming."

"Does he indeed?" asked her companion, who was younger than herself, and who evidently thought these effects must be produced in the same manner as by pulling a string, Punch, Judy and the hangman are set in motion. "And can you really make them do all that only just by talking of Italy? How very odd!"

That it was not very odd we can now understand, and in the following chapter we will resume the story where we left it.

CHAPTER III.

On the day after Colonel Leslie's arrival at Grantley the sun shone brightly as the assembled family met at breakfast with cheerful countenances, and if not all with glad hearts at least with kindly feelings towards each other. It was a hard frost, and the window panes were incrustated with those graceful and fantastic patterns in which we can trace all sorts of fanciful landscapes. The hoar-frost hung lightly on the branches of the trees, and the lawn sparkled with its diamond rays. Margaret sat at the head of the table making tea, the hissing urn before her; her little hands busily managing the old silver teapot, the large coffee cups, and the blue Sèvres cream-jug, and the huge embossed sugar-basin. A cap with pink ribbons was fastened gracefully at the back of her very small head, her large violet eyes seemed to have borrowed their colour from the hyacinth or the iris, and her voice was sweet and clear as the tone of the silver bell by her side. Four pair of eyes in that room were fixed upon her with fond but very different expressions; not to mention those of the family pictures which seemed staring at her also, and those of Ebro and Tagus, the two large dogs, who, with wistful countenances, gazed alternately upon her and the buttered cakes before her. As she laid her hand on the black head of one, and thrust a large morsel into the open mouth of the other, she said to Walter—

“You are not going home to-day, are you?”

“Why?”

Walter glanced across the table at Colonel Leslie, who was busily engaged with the newspaper. Margaret, who thought that look implied that it was now her father's business and not her's to press him to stay, coloured and said in a low voice—

“I am sure he wishes you to stay; pray do, Walter.”

“I cannot, indeed; I am expected at home.”

“And for what important business, that you put on so serious a manner?”

"Nothing *very* important. A friend of mine is coming to us, and I must be at Heron Castle to receive him."

"A friend of your's! How curious I shall be to see him!"

"Curious! why curious?"

"Oh, because he must be something very wonderful. I never heard of your having a friend before."

"I am sorry you think me so utterly friendless."

"Oh, not altogether friendless. Grandpapa is your friend, and so am I, and Mr. Killigrew is your friend, and so is the old clerk, and Mrs. Fellowes, too, in a sort of a way; but I never knew you have a friend before on a formal visit to Heron Castle, a friend who kept you from Grantley, and whom you called in that mysterious manner, without naming him at once, 'a friend of your's!'"

"There is nothing mysterious about him. His name is Edmund Neville."

"The same whose life you saved a few years ago in Ireland?"

"Exactly."

"O then I know all about him, and I am much relieved."

"Why relieved?"

"Because I had fancied that your friend would have been a sort of counterpart of yourself."

"And *two* such you could never have endured?"

"Why, dear Walter, I think you as near perfection as any one can be; but had your friend been exactly like you, you would have lost your originality, and a bad specimen of you I could not have tolerated."

"Well, you may comfort yourself, then, for we are as unlike as possible."

"Is he as grateful to you as he ought to be?"

"I do not see what gratitude he owes me."

"Did you not save his life?"

"I did by him what I would have done by any human being I had seen in danger of perishing. I see no merit in that."

"Merit!" exclaimed Mrs. Thornton; "no, indeed, my dear Walter, there was no merit in it, except the honour it did to your head and heart; but it is a bad precedent, indeed it is, to risk one's own life——"

"It is a precedent not likely to be too often followed," impatiently interrupted Colonel Leslie. "What is this story, Walter?"

"Let *me* tell it," said Margaret, eagerly.

Walter shrugged his shoulders impatiently, and she went on :

“ It was about nine years ago that it happened, when Walter was staying in Ireland, at Mr. Neville’s house—”

“ My dear,” interrupted Mrs. Thornton, “ your father does not care at whose house the accident happened.”

“ I happen to care,” quietly remarked Colonel Leslie, “ if it is Mr. Neville of Clantoy; I knew him at Oxford.”

“ It is,” said Walter.

“ I remember,” rejoined Leslie, “ that he was one of the fiercest Orangemen in our debating club. I can remember, now, a violent and eloquent speech he made against Catholic Emancipation. He was a prejudiced but a clever fellow—”

“ And such he has been ever since,” returned Walter, “ and where his predilections and his antipathies do not bias his judgment, he is an excellent and most upright man; but his early impressions never forsook him, and subsequent events seem to have fixed them in his mind with indelible colours. He had made it a rule not to take a Catholic servant into his house, and had always strictly adhered to it; but his gamekeeper, who was one of those old hereditary domestics who succeed to the keeper’s office and to his lodge with the same regularity as heirs apparent to their ancestral halls, married a Roman Catholic wife, who had brought up her son in her own faith. Knowing the strong prejudices of his master, he had carefully kept this fact from his knowledge, and as he was himself a regular attendant at the parish church, and Mr. Neville was not in the habit of troubling himself about the families of his servants, he knew nothing whatever of the religious creed of the boy Maxwell, who being in the meantime permitted to become the constant companion of the young heir, and his associate in all field sports and rural amusements, a very strong attachment sprung up between the two youths. One day when they were clambering up trees in the park, John Maxwell broke one of the branches with his weight, and fell heavily to the ground. He was taken up senseless, and it was found that he had suffered a concussion of the brain. After a long confinement, he recovered his bodily, but not his mental health and strength, and exhibited, from that time, occasional symptoms of partial derangement. Still, as there was nothing alarming in those symptoms, and the interest of young Neville for his companion was increased by an accident that had befallen him in his service, no interruption of their habits took place. The violence which Maxwell sometimes

displayed towards others, was never shown towards Edmund, to whom he always evinced the most devoted affection. Among other pastimes, the boys were accustomed to scamper over the roof of the old castellated house, and one day that they had mounted there together, Maxwell was seized with one of those sudden and irresistible impulses which are the characteristics of insanity, and clasping his companion in his arms, endeavoured to precipitate him over the battlement. At first, Edmund fancied that he was in jest, but when he found the attempt was real, he struggled with all his might, clung to one of the buttresses with the strength of despair—

“And he was saved,” interrupted Margaret, turning to her father, “saved by Walter’s intrepidity and presence of mind. He perceived from below the dreadful struggle, and swinging himself, at the peril of his life, from cornice to cornice, he scaled the outside wall of the turret, and reached the roof in time to rescue the boy from the grasp of the madman, who attacked him in his turn with desperate violence. Was it not so, Walter?”

“It was,” he replied. “The scene was short but dreadful. I cannot think of it to this day without shuddering. The servants soon came to my assistance, and the unfortunate youth was secured. From that moment he became a confirmed maniac, and was placed in confinement. This incident, of course, made a great noise all over the country, and many stories concerning it were invented and circulated by the gossips about the place. Amongst others, it was reported that a Catholic priest had employed Maxwell as an instrument towards young Neville’s conversion, and had so worked on his mind by spiritual terrors as to drive him to insanity. Mr. Neville had of course been greatly excited by the occurrence, and those false and absurd rumours were very soon conveyed to his ears. He thus learnt, for the first time, that the constant companion, and very nearly the murderer of his only son, was a Catholic; and though he did not actually credit all the foolish stories which were current in the neighbourhood, his indignation was very great at the deceit which he considered had been practised upon him, and a fresh stimulus was thereby given to those religious antipathies which were already too strongly implanted in his mind, and his hatred of the Catholic religion, and of all who professed it, became more rooted, and assumed a more inveterate character than ever.”

“Horrible!” muttered Colonel Leslie.

"Very natural indeed," observed Mrs. Thornton, "to hate the man who has almost killed your child. I really think it quite wicked not to make allowances for people's feelings. Why, to this day I cannot look with any comfort on a Frenchman, since the French-master gave Eustace the scarlet-fever. He came to him with a face as red, and a throat as sore—"

"Why, my dear," interrupted Mr. Thornton, "you do not suppose, do you, that the man did it on purpose?"

"I suppose nothing, Mr. Thornton. I assert nothing. I do not wish to judge of people's motives; but only maintain that from that day to this, the idea of contagion has been linked in my mind with the very sight of a Frenchman." And Mrs. Thornton poked the fire with an energy and a conscious freedom from prejudice, that made Leslie and Walter, in spite of themselves, smile as they looked at each other.

Indeed, few things drew a smile from Leslie so readily as some piece of folly or inconsistency in others, and there was something bitterly sarcastic in the curl of his lip and the expression of his half-closed eyes. Even when anything appeared to work on his better feelings, and to inspire him with any degree of admiration or interest, he seemed not to sneer at others for being great and good, but at himself for being moved to appreciate it, and a bitter jest was generally the fruit of a latent emotion. As he became domesticated at Grantley, and renewed his intimacy with Walter, he could not help respecting his character, and admiring his way of thinking; but unwilling to betray this, he often sought to throw ridicule on his pursuits, if not on himself, in a way which was perfectly indifferent to the object of these attacks, but which tried his daughter's patience severely. Margaret's feelings were warm, and her temper not much under control; her affection for Walter made her peculiarly alive to the least allusion aimed at him in Colonel Leslie's conversation. Sometimes the injured Walter would rouse himself from a fit of abstraction, and observe her cheek flushed and her eyes darting fire at some remark which either had escaped his notice, or in which he had not discovered, or at least not resented, the latent sting. But we must now return to the day which followed Colonel Leslie's arrival at Grantley, and own that our little heroine, deprived of the society of Walter, and left in what was to her an awful *tête-à-tête* with her father, had some trouble to keep up her spirits; and when the two succeeding days also elapsed without bringing with them any change or variety in the shape of a visit

from the inhabitants of Heron Castle, an occurrence on which she confidently reckoned, it was with difficulty that she restrained her impatience.

On the fourth day, having been again disappointed, she determined to order her horse, and late in the afternoon to ride to the vicarage, where Mr. and Mrs. Thornton had returned on the same morning that Walter had left Grantley. That vicarage was as pretty a home as can be well imagined,—one of those low-roofed, straggling cottages, to which a room had been added here and an angle there, till the original shape of the building had merged in these successive additions. Creepers and evergreens, and a gleam of sunshine, made it look as gay on that November afternoon as if spring, instead of winter, had been approaching. A few dahlias and chrysanthemums still adorned the beds, and the hollies were already displaying their coral berries. Margaret's spirits rose as she galloped across the park, and drew near to the iron gate which separated it from the grounds of the vicarage-house. And when she came in sight of the house itself, every small-paned window, every smoking chimney, every laurel bush seemed to give her a welcome. The house-dog barked furiously, the gate swung merrily on its hinges, the door-bell rung gaily as she approached, and she jumped off her pony as lightly as if for three whole days she had not been measuring her words, and glancing timidly at Colonel Leslie's face, with the secret conviction that he thought her a fool, or a bore. Her grandfather, who from his study had seen her arrive, came hastily to the door, kissed her cold blooming cheeks, called her his darling child, begged her not to stand in the draught, and led her into the little drawing-room, where his wife was employed at an endless piece of tapestry work, which had been as often unpicked as Penelope's, though not on as systematic a plan, or with so deliberate a purpose. Margaret tenderly kissed her grandmother, took the well-known work out of her hands, threw her own hat and whip on a couch, settled herself in a low comfortable arm-chair, threaded a needle, and began working as if for her life.

"Grandpapa!" she exclaimed in a moment, "grandpapa I know now what the poor dogs feel when their muzzles are taken off."

"Do you, darling? How so?"

"I have been muzzled for the last four days," she returned with a nod and a smile that made her grandfather stoop down and kiss her forehead, while he said:

"Foolish child!"

"Aye, grandpapa, *you* say 'Foolish child!' and it means, 'Dear, clever, darling girl.' While my father says, when I make a remark, 'Very true, my love,' and *that* means, 'I wish the girl would hold her tongue.' So much for the value of *words*."

"Words, my dear," observed Mrs. Thornton, sententiously, "are only the signs of things."

"True, grandmamma, and certain things had better give no signs of life at all; such as a father's aversion to his child," she added, with a tone of mingled emotion and resentment.

"Nonsense, my love," cried Mr. Thornton, "how could anybody have an aversion to you, and still less your own father?"

"There is no accounting for aversions, Mr. Thornton," observed his wife; "I have felt myself the most inexplicable preferences for some people, and dislikes for others. I never could abide the sight of Mary Dickins, Mrs. Sydney's housemaid, or of the young curate who did duty here last Sunday."

"He squints, grandmamma, and Mary Dickins has a crooked mouth and a bottle-nose," cried Margaret, glancing at the opposite looking-glass, which, certainly, reflected an image ill-calculated to inspire aversion.

At that moment the door opened, and two gentlemen came in, the very two for whose appearance Margaret had vainly watched during the last four days. Walter Sydney shook hands with her, and then introduced his companion, young Neville, who, after a slight bow, turned away, and withdrew into a recess behind Mrs. Thornton's embroidery frame. Margaret had been anxious to see Edmund Neville; first, because she had heard of him all her life; and, secondly, because that wish had been thwarted for three whole days. She was somewhat disappointed at his appearance—people we have heard of and thought of much are seldom like what we have expected to see; and though Walter had told her that his friend was not tall, that he was very slight, and that, with the exception of a pair of handsome dark grey eyes, shaded with black eyebrows and eyelashes, he had not a good feature in his face; she had pictured to herself a very different *héros de roman* from the boy, as she rather contemptuously termed him in her own mind, who was now sitting opposite to her.

In order to explain why he need have been a *héros de roman* at all, we must unveil a little more of that secret web which is woven in a girl's mind during the time when her future destiny is a mystery to her. Margaret, like—not *all*—but *most* girls, from the time

that she had ceased to consider her own marriage as an event that would as naturally and as inevitably occur as having her first gown substituted for a frock, her hair turned up with a comb instead of flowing in ringlets over her neck, or dining at seven with grown-up people instead of at two with her governess, had often revolved in her secret thoughts what was likely to be her destiny in that line. It must be confessed that the idea had often suggested itself to her mind that Mr. Edmund Neville, the friend—almost, like herself, the adopted child of Walter,—the heir to an immense property in Ireland, and, as she had heard, distinguished at Oxford for his remarkable abilities, would be a very desirable husband for the heiress of Grantley Manor. On this notion had been built up many secret imaginings, many vague cogitations respecting his probable merits, his qualities, his looks, and the circumstances that would attend their first meeting. This event had now come to pass, but unattended with any exciting incidents; and what was still more provoking, she did not herself feel in the least excited; but, turning to Walter, she said in a low voice—

“What an unkind man you are, not to have been to see me for three whole days! Account for yourself, Old Walter, or I shall think you the most capricious and inconsiderate of men.”

She could not repress a smile as she made this accusation; it was so inconsistent with Walter's character, that she fully expected he would regard it as a jest; but strange to say, he looked a little embarrassed at the charge, and said he had intended to come, but had been twice accidentally prevented just as his horse's head was turned towards Grantley.

“Have you been showing Mr. Neville the beauties of the country?” said Margaret, who was curious to hear her new acquaintance speak.

He turned his head suddenly towards her, the colour rushed into his cheek, the keen glance of his eye rested one instant on her face, and then was rapidly withdrawn. Opening Mrs. Thornton's “Every Lady her Own Knitter,” or some such erudite guide to learning, he began reading out to her, in a low voice, directions for the manufacture of a poor man's waistcoat, and then begged to count the stitches in her work, and appeared quite absorbed with this occupation, while Walter was replying to Margaret's question. Not being much accustomed to give up any point, however trifling, on which her mind was set, she cut this answer rather short, and turning to young Neville, asked him what he thought of the scenery of Brace Muir, the object of their excursion on the preceding day.

He gave a slight start when she spoke to him, and answered, without raising his eyes from the rows of knitting which he was counting, "It is very wild, very picturesque." Then in a hurried manner he held out the knitting to Mrs. Thornton, with several stitches in it dropped, and walking up to the flower-stand, he smelt the geraniums and twisted their leaves, with a heightened colour and restless manner.

"It is getting late, my love," cried Mr. Thornton from the lawn in front of the drawing-room; "your pony is impatient, and you had better be off."

"We will accompany you," said Walter, "it will scarcely lengthen our ride, and I should like Neville to see the beeches of Grantley before they have shed all their leafy honours."

"I must go back straight to Heron Castle," cried his friend hastily; "I have a letter to write before the post goes out: but I know the way, so do not think of me."

Margaret was provoked; it was evident that Walter's friend was resolved not to make her acquaintance, and bent on avoiding her society. A slight, almost imperceptible, swelling of heart, accompanied this impression. She was not pained, no indeed; nor mortified either. What was it to her—what did she care whether that ill-mannered boy chose to notice her or not? It was very good-natured of her to have offered to talk to him. She had no wish, now, ever to set her eyes on him again. She was sorry for Walter that his friend was so ungracious and unsatisfactory. She did not wish indeed that Walter had allowed him to be tossed off the battlements of his own castle; but she did wish he had not asked him to Heron Castle to spoil all their comfort. She was just seated in her saddle, and gathering the bridles in her hand, when, turning towards the windows of the dining-room to nod a last adieu to Mrs. Thornton, her eyes met those of Neville, who was standing by her grandmother's side. They were fixed upon her with an intense and piercing earnestness which startled and confused her.

The next moment, long before they had reached the gate of the park, she had made up her mind that Walter had all along had it in his head to bring about a marriage between her and his friend; that he had probably hinted this to him; that this had been very foolish of Walter, for it had put a constraint on their first acquaintance, which would however very soon wear off; and by the time they turned the corner of the avenue, she had begun to examine in her own mind whether Edmund was not rather too short and

too slight to be reckoned good-looking ; whether she should, on the whole, like to marry an Irishman ; whether there was any Irish accent in his way of speaking ; and, above all, whether there was likely to be any opportunity of ascertaining this fact. There was no time to be lost in investigating the subject, for with Margaret there was generally little or no interval between the thought in the mind, and the words on the lips. That interval ! How it varies with different people !—How much turns upon it ! What a rubicon it is—that second, during which the impetuous impulse of the heart, or the rapid conception of the brain, moulds itself into words, and assumes a living shape !—During which, some can deliberately close “ the barriers of their teeth,” as the Eastern proverb has it, and force back the rising flood,—some, into the polluted dens they call their hearts,—some, into the secret shrines where self is sacrificed and God adored !

What a strange power there is in *silence*. How many resolutions are formed ; how many sublime conquests effected during that pause, when the lips are closed, and the soul secretly feels the eye of her Maker upon her. When some of those cutting sharp, blighting words have been spoken which send the hot indignant blood to the face and head, if those to whom they are addressed keep silence, look on with awe, for a mighty work is going on within them, and the Spirit of Evil, or their Guardian Angel is very near to them in that hour. During that pause they have made a step towards Heaven or towards Hell, and an item has been scored in the book which the day of judgment shall see opened. They are the strong ones of the earth, the mighty for good or for evil, those who know how to keep silence when it is a pain and a grief to them ; those who give *time* to their own soul, to wax strong against temptation ; or to the powers of wrath, to stamp upon her the mark of their withering passage.

Margaret was not, at this time at least, one of these mighty ones, and the thought that crossed her mind seldom failed to pass her lips, especially when Walter was at her side. She had not therefore been many minutes seated in her saddle before, to use a common expression, she took the bull by the horns, or rather the mane of her companion's horse in her hand, and rolling the rough hair round and round her little finger, she asked—

“ How long is Mr. Neville going to stay with you ? ”

“ A few days longer, I believe. How do you like him ? ”

As she left the Vicarage drawing-room, Margaret would certainly

have answered "Not at all," but there had been something in that earnest gaze which she had detected through the clematis creepers of the dining-room window which disposed her to suspend her unfavourable judgment. She thought it accordingly more prudent not to commit herself, and said with a smile,

"Why, in truth, he seems little inclined to give me an opportunity of judging."

"I suppose," said Walter in the same tone, "that he is afraid of you."

"Afraid of me!" cried Margaret, with a burst of her own merry laugh, "I wish that was true! I should like to see somebody afraid of *me*! Why, Walter, I cannot, by dint of frowning and lecturing, make one of the school-children afraid of me. I threatened the other day to turn Martin Dick, the carpenter's fat boy, out of the room, but when he put his thumb to his nose, and spread his fingers out, looking all the time so impudently good-tempered, I laughed outright, and compromised my dignity. What black fingers they were, too!" she added, laughing again at the recollection, while with her own she imitated the attitude of the naughty school-boy, and looked so very pretty, that Walter said, in a half-grumbling tone,

"Some people might be afraid of you, though Martin Dick is not. Afraid of loving you too much, you little witch!"

"More than I deserve, you mean, Old Walter? Well! *you* may be afraid of that; though I should hope your case was a hopeless one; but as to Mr. Neville, *he* can have none of *that* sort of fear."

O Margaret! Margaret! this was the first time in your life that you did not speak the exact truth: for did you not think, even while those words were in your mouth, that just such a fear as that, would make somebody avoid you in a vicarage drawing-room, and peep at you through branches of clematis?—and did you not begin to revolve in secret why Edmund Neville should be afraid of thinking you too pretty, or making friends with you, when the very worst that could happen to him, would be to fall in love with one of the most captivating heiresses that ever mounted a little spirited Arabian;—and who now, as the wind blew about the brown curls that escaped from under her hat, bent her head low to avoid the spreading arms of the old oaks through which she winded her way; and as she darted out of the grove into the open plain, drew herself up, and shook back those troublesome curls, and reined in her horse, till he arched his neck, and shook back his mane too, and bounded

along, as if the hope of conquest, and the pride of beauty, and the schemes of youth, and the visions of joy, and the magic scenes which fancy draws on the blank pages of futurity, were stirring at *his* heart, and flushing before *his* eyes, as well as in those of his mistress?

Ride on Margaret! Ride on while you may, with that bright colour in your cheek, with that smile in your eyes, with that joy at your heart. The blue sky is over your head, and the smooth green turf beneath your feet, and the Spirit of Hope within you is undimmed and strong. Ride on! with Old Walter at your side, and his voice of kindness in your ear; for the tried affection of early days is a holy thing, and the heart that has loved you in childhood, and the eyes that have gazed on you in infancy, are loving you, and watching over your still. Ride on! and while you urge to his full speed your bounding favourite, and turn your glowing cheek to catch the cold breeze that sweeps across the plain, fear not for the morrow; for the child lies down to sleep by the side of the precipice, and the sea-bird folds his wing on the crest of the wave, and the butterfly dances forth in the sunny days of the spring, and *fear* was not made for the young, for the strong, for the beautiful. Alas! for those who watch! Alas! for those who *fear*! The child wakes, and the chasm is deep! The sea-bird's pinions are weak, and the hurricane is strong! The sunny days of spring wax stormy, and the spring of life is often darkened! Ride on Margaret, ride on while the wintry wind brings colour to your cheek, health to your frame, and joy to your heart!

CHAPTER IV.

As Walter was galloping by Margaret's side along the road which followed the sinuosities of the terrace that overhung the park, the loud report of the keeper's gun which he was discharging in the court behind the house, startled his horse, who, suddenly veering on one side, placed his foot on a loose brick at the foot of the wall, stumbled and fell. For an instant Walter's foot was entangled in the stirrup, and for an instant bore the whole weight of the prostrate animal. When he extricated himself, he became immediately conscious of a severe sprain, and it was only by the assistance of a servant who had hurried down from the house at the sight of the accident that he was enabled to reach the hall door, when he nearly fainted from the intensity of the pain. He was immediately conveyed to his *own* apartment, as a bow-windowed cheerful bedroom, and little adjoining sitting-room, had been for many years always considered; and Margaret, after seeing him laid on a couch, and having summoned Mrs. Ramsay, the housekeeper, to administer such remedies as her skill could suggest, proceeded to her father's library in order to acquaint him with the accident. She knocked at the door, and receiving no answer after two or three attempts, opened it gently. Colonel Leslie was sitting by the fire, with his face buried in his hands, and Margaret doubted whether he was asleep or deep in thought. It is awkward to wake a person suddenly either from sleep or from abstraction, and she fidgetted about till her father suddenly turned round, and with a loud "Who is there?" in her turn startled her. With a trembling voice she related Walter's accident, and as Colonel Leslie looked at her pale cheek and anxious countenance, his own softened, and passing his arm kindly round her waist, he told her to show him the way to Walter's room. When they reached it, Mrs. Ramsay's fomentations had begun to take effect, at least it may be supposed so, for Walter received them with a smile, and an assurance that though he could not walk, he did not suffer much. At the same time there was a slight contraction in his forehead, and a nervous movement

in his hands that invalidated the truth of the assertion ; but Margaret was satisfied with the assurance. Young people (Heaven bless them) are easily comforted, and they jump at anything which relieves them from the irksome necessity of being sorry.

"And if dear Walter's pain will but go," she exclaimed, as she bent over him, and tapped his pillow-cushion to make it comfortable, and threw a pink *barège* shawl over his feet, "it will not be at all unpleasant to have him for once tied by the leg, literally tied by the leg. Yes, yes, you volatile Old Walter, we have clipped your wings, and now you must stay, '*nolens volens*' as you used to say. You see I have not forgotten all my Latin."

"Well, if you have not forgotten your English either, I shall get you to write a note to my mother, as you and Leslie seem to think I cannot go home at present."

"Of course not," cried Colonel Leslie; "and, by the way, as that young Neville, who is on a visit to you, is the son of an old friend of mine, and would be no doubt in your father's way during your absence, ask him to come here. He can have plenty of shooting, and hunting too, if he likes it, and I dare say Margaret can amuse him in the evenings."

"Thank you," said Walter, "if it is not inconvenient to you, I should like it."

"Write to Mrs. Sydney, Margaret, and send a groom with the note. He must also call at Dr. Bartlet's on his way. Walter should see him to-night, for I can observe by that restless twitching in the leg that he is still suffering."

Margaret went to the library to write her note. She thought it rather an important one. First, it was necessary to let Mrs. Sydney know of Walter's accident without frightening her; then there was the message about Mr. Neville; very likely he would see this note—and people are very apt to form their judgments of others from their notes. She would herself feel rather curious to read a note written by Edmund Neville, to see what kind of hand he wrote, and he might just feel the same curiosity about hers. Indeed, had he not been a curious person, he would not have gazed so earnestly on her from behind those clematis branches. In the silver inkstand in the library, there were three pens that had been used before, two black smeared, and one white one. Margaret chose the last. There is a peculiar way in which people set about writing one of these important notes—a note that sets you thinking of the moment when it will be received, and the person who will read it. Gene-

rally, like Margaret, they select a new pen; they take just ink enough and not too much, for fear any word should be illegible; a fear that never seems to occur to them in ordinary cases (what a blessing for their correspondents if it did); and then they so carefully weigh the difference between two nearly synonymous words, and it becomes a matter of consequence whether they are their correspondents "very truly," or, "very sincerely;" or whether they shall begin with a familiar "Dear," or an impressive "My dear." Then the direction never seems clear or distinct enough; and those long-tried and well-trusted means of conveyance, letter-bags or letter-boxes, mail-coaches or mail-trains, all at once assume an awful character of insecurity, and no sort of confidence is felt that they will perform their part in that particular instance. Margaret, however, had a simpler process to depend upon for the transmission of her letter than the complicated machinery of the post-office, and having at length satisfied herself as to its composition, she consigned it to the hands of the butler, with an urgent order that a groom should take it instantly to Heron Castle, and wait for an answer, not forgetting to call at Dr. Bartlet's on his way; and then she went up to her own room to meditate a little on the occurrences of the day, and on their probable consequences.

Most people feel the charm or the comfort of *their own room*,—but a young girl's is different from any one else's own room. As we advance in life we close the door behind us to be quiet, to shut out, for a while, the world and its cares; sometimes to muse with grateful hearts on mercies received, or dangers escaped; sometimes to evoke in silence the ghosts of past blessings, and the memories of happier days—if unhappy, on our knees to gain peace, or in dull abstraction find repose—if happy, either to thank God calmly, and set about our daily work cheerfully; or may be, like the rich man in the parable, to bid our souls be at ease, for much good is laid up in store for us; to dwell on the realities of life, to gather strength or apathy against the day of trial, to feel, indeed, sorrow and gladness by turns, for we grieve and we rejoice to the end—but the one has grown calm, and the other hard—the blossom has faded, and what remains?—a withered husk, or a glorious fruit! But when a young girl enters her own room, and shuts the door behind her, it is the dull realities of life she excludes, and a world of enchantment that she enters—whether with her eyes on the ground, or unconsciously fixed on the broad landscape; the single tree, or the slated roof, which her window-frame spans; or

else, while with hurried footsteps she paces up and down the narrow space before her, she acts in spirit, she rehearses in thought, she paints in fancy, the scenes which the veil of futurity still hides from her sight, with a vivid interest and a strength of emotion which life itself seldom yields, and the childish secrets of her solitude are to her the most exciting and the busiest portion of existence. Very busy was Margaret in that line; and while her maid placed one camellia in her hair, and then another, she thought till her head almost ached of the probable consequences of the invitation that had just been despatched.

Luckily for her Mrs. Dalton walked in just then with a nosegay of hot-house flowers, provided every day for her by the old gardener; and still more luckily, after expatiating a little on Walter's accident, she asked the very question Margaret wished to be asked. Rare luck for Mrs. Dalton, whose questions were not often so acceptable!

"Well, my dear, have you seen young Mr. Neville?"

"Yes. Have you, Mrs. Dalton?"

"Indeed I have, my dear; and had some conversation with him too."

"Where? When? How could you have met him?"

"Why, the fact is, my dear, I wanted a *Colchicum Autumnale* to complete the collection of *Melanthaceæ* which Miss Flummer describes in the fifth chapter of her little work, '*Botany made easy*.' It is six weeks since we read that chapter together, dear: you know you do not take much to botany, but yet I never saw you so pleased before with any work upon it, as with those first chapters of '*Botany made easy*.'"

Here Margaret gave a sudden jerk, which was not calculated to make her maid consider her task as "*Hair-dressing made easy*."

"Yes, yes, it is a very nice little book, but did you find—"

"Yes, my dear, a very fine specimen, indeed; but not exactly the same as Miss Flummer—"

"O, do leave Miss Flummer alone; I hate the very sound of her name. Was it in the garden you met?"

"No, dear, in the churchyard; it grows under the old elm."

"O, the plant, yes! but I meant Mr. Neville."

"I beg your pardon, my dear. Yes it was in the churchyard I saw him."

"What could he be doing there?"

"He was looking at the inscriptions on some of the tombs. Just as I passed him, my tin box fell out of my hand; he very civilly picked it up, and, as I was thanking him, he asked me to point out to him the monuments of the Leslie family, and as I showed him where they stood, he inquired if I was a member of your family; and on hearing I was, or rather had been, your governess—"

"Never mind, dear Dally," interrupted Margaret, laying her hand on the old lady's arm, "you never governed at all, so you shall be called governess as long as you please, even when I am a very old maid; but go on; never mind the dressing-bell, you need not make yourself smart. So Mr. Neville found out you were my governess! And how did you find out who *he* was?"

"As I left the lodge, I had seen him ride along the fish-pond, and old James told me he was the youngster, as he called him, that was staying at Heron Castle."

"Now, tell me; what did he ask about *me*?"

"How old you were."

"Humph! What was that to him, I wonder! And what else?"

"He said, 'Was it not true that Miss Leslie had a charming disposition?'"

"Now, I should like to know what you said in answer to *that*, Mrs. Dalton. Take care; you told me two days ago that I was the idlest, the vainest, and the most provoking young lady you had ever met with: yes, worse a great deal than Mrs. Atkin's seven daughters, or Sir Charles Butcher's nine—so now I hope you did not go and humbug poor Mr. Neville about me."

"I said, Miss Margaret, that I was not in the habit of talking over the characters of my pupils, with strangers especially; this I said with a bow and a smile, so as to show the young gentleman I was not offended, and on other subjects had no objection to talk to him."

"Well done, Dally! No doubt he supposes I am a little vixen, of whom you can say no good, and therefore that in charity you hold your tongue about me. How ill-natured of you not to say that I was a little angel. It is what everybody expects of their governess, though they may have been little devils all their lives. I wish anybody would only ask me what sort of governess you were. I should look mysterious, and sigh, and refuse to speak, as if you had bullied me within an inch of my life for the last fifteen years."

"For shame, Miss Leslie," said Dally, trying to look grave, but giving, in spite of herself, a grim smile.

"And now," cried Margaret, forcibly detaining the retiring Mrs. Dalton, "and now, what else did you talk about?"

"The country, and the garden, and the neighbours, and Mr. Walter Sydney."

"O, he spoke of Walter, did he? As he ought, I hope?"

"He said he loved him as if he did not fear him, and feared him as if he did not love him."

"Did he really? How very well expressed; but it was odd to say that to you, a perfect stranger."

"Not quite a stranger."

"Why? How? What do you mean?"

"The dinner-bell!" cried the horrified Mrs. Dalton, as the vision of keeping the Colonel waiting presented itself to her affrighted eyes, while the gong resounded in her ears.

"O never mind," cried Margaret, answering the thought, not the words. "Put on the lavender cap and the lace tippet, and you will be ready in a minute; but Dally, mind," she continued, following Mrs. Dalton down the passage, "that you make haste at dessert with those eternal chesnuts you are so fond of, for I shall nod and come away *very* soon. I am so very curious."

Colonel Leslie was that day more conversible than usual at dinner, and while he was giving an animated account of some incidents in the Peninsular War, Margaret forgot her impatience to leave the dining-room, and her eyes flashed with such excitement, that her father said, with a smile, "I believe you would like to lead a forlorn hope yourself, you look so very heroic at this moment."

As I once said before, Colonel Leslie's smiles were sneers, and the sudden way in which he had checked her enthusiasm struck coldly on his daughter's heart. She bit her lips, looked attentively at the birds on her Dresden china plate, and after a pause Mrs. Dalton and herself hurried to the drawing-room. Margaret stood before the blazing fire, and twisting an allumette in her hand, said, aloud, but to herself, "O no, I could not lead a forlorn hope!"

"The Colonel did not really mean you could, my dear," observed Mrs. Dalton.

"I cannot understand the courage of despair. I could do great

things if I had strong hopes of success; but forlorn hopes, desperate struggles—O no, it tires me to think of them.”

“Then don’t think of them, dear child. Won’t you have some coffee?”

“Could *you* lead a forlorn hope, Dally?”

“I hope I could.”

“What *can* make you feel as if *you* could, when I feel *I* could not?”

“Why, you know, if I were a soldier, it *might* be me duty.”

“What a cold word *duty* is. I could not do right things merely because it were my duty.”

“That is, perhaps, the reason, my dear, why you seldom do right things.”

“Perhaps it is,” said Margaret, slowly, “I know it would be right to try, but it is *such* a forlorn hope,” she added, half sadly, half gaily.

“What do you mean, my dear?”

“To make my father love me,” was the answer.

This was a theme on which Mrs. Dalton never suffered Margaret to proceed. She had that intimate persuasion that what *ought* to be, should never be supposed *not* to be, that the most distant admission of the sort, seemed, in her eyes, almost as shocking as the fact itself, and she desired Margaret, in a much more authoritative manner than usual, not to talk such wicked non-sense. At this opportune moment the door opened, and a servant brought a note which Margaret took with great eagerness, and which seemed to turn her thoughts into quite another channel, for she had scarcely read it when she exclaimed—

“Oh! by the way, how came Mr. Neville not to be altogether a stranger to you?”

“Don’t you know, my dear, that I lived some years in Mr. Warren’s family. Mrs. Warren was young Mr. Neville’s aunt, and when he was a very little boy he was once for some weeks entrusted to my care. I reminded him of this, and he perfectly recollected it, and named several little incidents that had occurred during that visit.”

“Was he a nice little boy?”

“Very spoilt, indeed, he was, and so wilful. He led one a weary life!”

Margaret laughed and said,

"He is coming here to-morrow. I hope he will not torment us much."

"O, not now, Miss Margaret, he is too old for that."

"Well, we shall see," cried Margaret, springing from her chair, with a bound that carried her in one second to the door, "perhaps people are never too old for that;" and as she rushed up the stairs to the landing-place, and then down those which led to Walter's room, jumping two at a time, and singing out in different keys and with various roulades, these words:—"Two can play at that game,"—what was she thinking of? Of the dexterous activity with which she cleared those intervening steps? Of the cup and ball which she snatched up from the table, and managed with the most graceful skill? Or of the shuttlecock which by one little mischievous knock she sent flying across the lofty hall? No; I am afraid it meant, "If he means to plague me, I may perhaps plague him first!" For shame, Margaret! you did not deserve as you entered Walter's room, and asked him kindly how he did, and fetched a cushion for his head, and sat down by the side of his couch to read to him his mother's note, that he should take your hand and kiss it, and that he should call you the very best little woman in the whole world. You were not a bad one; no, perhaps a tolerably good one, as women go; but certainly not the very best, or anything like it. If he had said the very prettiest we might have let it pass.

The next day it was ascertained that Walter had sprained his leg so severely that it would be quite impossible for him to put his foot to the ground for a week or ten days, at least, and Dr. Bartlet recommended that even then he should not attempt much exertion, but suffer himself to be nursed and treated as an invalid for some time to come. Margaret heard this decision with considerable satisfaction, and spent an hour in pulling about the furniture in his room, and bringing within his reach everything he could possibly want during what she called his imprisonment.

"Hard labour," she said, "in the House of Correction; which means, dear Walter, that you are to labour hard for a month to correct my faults."

"You must confess them before I can correct them," answered Walter, with a smile. Margaret looked a *little* graver than usual, and folded her arms, as she stood at the end of the couch exactly opposite to Walter."

"I could not bear you to think ill of me," she said at last; and

after a pause added, with a forced laugh, "and shall not, therefore, choose you for my confessor."

An hour afterwards, after entangling further some very entangled knitting, with a desperate pull, which served to bring matters to a crisis, she asked—

"Walter, do you think it a great fault to wish *passionately* to be liked, praised, and loved?"

"No; not a great fault in itself, but a dangerous taste, and if it grows into a passion, not seldom a fatal one."

After a pause, seeing that she remained silent, he continued—

"But is it *all* praise you care about? Is it the affection of any-one or everyone that you covet?"

"Not alike," she replied; "but none comes amiss. I like the house-dog to wag his tail at my approach. Cousin Mary's baby to throw his arms round my neck when I kiss him. I like kind, loving faces about me; and I hate a cold, stern look, as I do a dark and gloomy day. I wish to be loved, as I wish the sun to shine upon me. As a sunless world, so would a loveless life be to me! Walter, can you fancy a more unhappy being than one whom nobody loved?"

"Yes; one who loved no one."

"Would that be worse, do you think? Can love be its own reward?"

Walter opened a volume that was lying by his side, and read out loud the following beautiful passage from one of Scott's novels:—

"Her thoughts were detached from the world, and only visited it, with an interest like that which guardian-spirits take for their charge, in behalf of those with whom she lived in love, or of the poor whom she could serve and comfort—"

"That is like *you*," said Margaret, as he closed the book; "and that is the sort of love you would feel for others. I shall never be so unselfish."

At that moment her eyes were fixed on the window, and a smile hovered on her lips as the sound of horse's feet on the pavement of the inner court announced an arrival. She rose hastily, but before she had made her escape through one door the other was flung open, and Edmund Neville made his appearance. Without being really handsome, he had some of the picturesque qualities of beauty. The deep colour in his cheek, and the earnest expression of his eyes, as he advanced towards Walter, and anxiously in-

quired if he was still suffering from his accident, gave him favour in Margaret's eyes. He turned quickly towards her, and held out his hand as to an old acquaintance; his manner quite changed from that of the day before. When she moved to go away, he took her by surprise, by saying, with a kind of childish but arbitrary earnestness, "Don't go away."

Now, considering that she had not the least wish to go, it would have been ill-natured not to stay; and with a smile that said as much, she took a middle course, neither leaving the room, nor returning to her chair by the fire; but half leaning, half sitting, on the back of Walter's couch, she set about rubbing, with the corner of her embroidered pocket-handkerchief, a certain ink spot which disfigured the brightest peony on the chintz cover of the said sofa. That this notable employment could not come to a natural end (seeing that no rubbing has ever been known to take out ink-spots), was rather an advantage than not, under the circumstances; and it was not till the luncheon-bell rang, and Mr. and Mrs. Thornton, who were always invited to come to Grantley when any stranger was there, had made their appearance in the dining-room, that Margaret, for the third time, advanced towards the door, and this time was not checked in her progress, but glided down the oak-staircase with Edmund Neville by her side. Mr. Thornton, who was already seated before an immense game-pie, and with the wing of a partridge on his uplifted fork, and a broad smile on his radiant countenance, exclaimed, as she entered the room—

"How now, my darling; what makes you look so very bright to-day? Muzzle off, eh?"

She made a sign with her pretty head as if slipping it out of a collar, and drawing down the suspended pinion to her own plate with a little gentle violence, she laughed gaily at her own exploit; boasted of having her own way in everything, and managing everybody by hook or by crook; and lastly, in an under-tone, with a significant little nod, she said to Mrs. Dalton,

"And after all, Dally, I think I could lead a forlorn hope."

Three weeks had elapsed since Walter's accident, and to Margaret they had been some of the pleasantest she had ever known. She lived in a moral atmosphere, which to her was both natural and genial—that of praise and affection. Her grandfather and grandmother, and Mr. and Mrs. Sydney, who had come to Grantley to be near their son, all idolised her. She had grown up among them—under their eyes—on their knees. Her voice—her laugh

—had been the sunshine of their lives for the last seventeen years. *Margaret's room*, whether it were the tapestried bed-chamber at Heron Castle, where Walter had so often lifted her up as a baby, to look at the strange figures on the wall; where he had told her stories about the fierce Count Bertram and the gentle Lady Godiva; where she had shook her little fists at Queen Eleanor, the cruel dame in the red hood, and cried for fair Rosamond, the damsel in the green mantle; or whether it was the chintz bed-room at the Parsonage, whose sash-window opened on the smoothest lawn and the gaudiest flower-beds that ever adorned one of those pretty English homes—*Margaret's room* was the room in the house.

"My singing-bird is gone, Walter," Mrs. Sydney was wont to say to her son; "but I like to look at the empty cage, and think she will come back to it." Her pale, quiet Walter pressed her hand upon this; but latterly he had often replied, "You know, dearest mother, we cannot now hope to keep her often to ourselves." And then his fond, unwise, foolish mother would answer, "And why should we not keep her, some day, all to ourselves?" The colour would deepen on Walter's sallow cheek; and he would frown when his mother said this, but he did not, I fancy, love her the less for it.

When Margaret left the Parsonage, Mr. Thornton repeated, ten times a day, "What a plague it is that the child must go! What nonsense it is that she must go home at all!" And though Mrs. Thornton repeatedly assured him that it was not in the nature of things that people should always stay in the same place, and that she would rather see Margaret dead at her feet and buried in the churchyard than shut up for life in a poky house like their's; or, at other times, ask with a mild significant placidity, "What's the girl to us, or we to the girl, that she should never leave us?"—still she, too, pined for the return of the "bonny lass," (as the old Scotch gardener called her), and twenty times a day she looked up from her work (that everlasting white cat on a blue ground) to see whether the green gate was not swinging on its hinges to admit the old black pony, who had, for so many years, carried the little lady of the manor through the copse woods, the shady avenues, and the grassy glades of the fair valley of Grantley. All went well with Margaret during that dull month of November. Everybody smiled on her, and every eye that rested upon her gladdened as it gazed. Walter, her "dear Old Walter," she was sure must be very happy in his own favourite room, with his gentle

mother to nurse him, and her, his own little Margaret, to read to him, to sing to him, to fetch for him from the library those heavy dull wise books he was so fond of, and to carry his messages about the country, and convey to many a cottage, and many a sick-bed, the comforts he was wont to bestow day by day on those who stood in need of them. Whether the bright vision that passed before these sufferers' eyes, even though it left behind it substantial tokens of its presence, soothed their sorrows as much as the kind pressure of Walter's hand and the whispered words of support and of hope beyond what this world can give, that they were wont to receive from him, is doubtful; but she did her best, that fair and happy child of prosperity, and it was not her fault if a bitter experience had not yet taught her those secrets of the heart by which we find our way to the hearts of others. Yea, and the poor blessed her, and Walter praised her, and his mother worshipped her, and all spoiled her. Was that not enough to make her happy? Was it strange that her eyes grew brighter every day, her step lighter, and her laugh more joyous than ever?

CHAPTER V.

One morning that Margaret was at work in the drawing-room, and Mrs. Thornton was sorting worsteds at her side, Edmund Neville, whose eyes had been fixed upon some shades of grey as intently as if he, too, was about to shade the tail of a white cat, suddenly jumped up, and now rivetted his eyes on the entrance court, where Colonel Leslie was about to mount his horse.

"Where is your father going so early?" he asked of Margaret.

"To Lord Donnington's," she replied; "his place is fifteen miles off."

Having lost sight of Colonel Leslie, who at a rapid pace had galloped down the avenue, Edmund now turned again to Margaret, and with a manner that was peculiar to himself, and which was at once as coaxing as a child's, and as despotic as a young autocrat's, said, looking earnestly into her face—

"I want to see the house. Come and show me *all* the house."

"The kitchen and the cellars, I suppose?" asked Margaret, with a smile; "for you have seen all the rest."

"No, indeed, I have not examined the pictures in the dining-room; and I have never been into the inner library, nor into your father's study. Come with me."

"What an odd fancy," persisted Margaret.

"Not at all an odd fancy, my love," observed Mrs. Thornton; "and, phrenologically speaking, I can perfectly account for it."

Margaret who knew that her grandmother had been studying Combe during the last two days, instinctively wished to escape the threatened solution, and another impatient "Come" from Edmund was more effectual than the last, and both had reached the bottom of the stairs before Mrs. Thornton had recollected the exact phrenological bump by which she had intended to account for Mr. Neville's wish to see the house.

To describe Edmund Neville (not phrenologically, but in common plain language) is what must now be attempted, although it is a matter of some difficulty to find the exact terms in which to do so.

He was rather short and very slight, but yet his muscular and perfectly symmetrical figure conveyed a notion of remarkable activity and strength. His head was small and particularly well set on his shoulders; there was that singularly grave and refined manliness about his attitudes which brings to mind the portraits of Vandyke. His hair was very dark but not black, and his complexion at once pale and healthy. His eyes were very fine, but it would not have been easy to define their expression; eagerness was their chief characteristic, and this peculiarity contrasted strangely with the general languor and carelessness of his manner. His eyes were fine, they seemed to read into your soul, but they did not allow you to read into his. His manner combined a winning childlike ease with a more than ordinary self-possession. His lips were thin, and the lines round his well-formed mouth indicated a fixity of purpose, scarcely consisting with the apparent indolence of his character. It was like his hand which, soft and white as it was, had the strength of a steel spring, and could break at once a bough which Colonel Leslie and Mr. Thornton had vainly attempted to bend. In the smallest occurrences of life he practised a strength of volition which it was very difficult to withstand. He obliged Mrs. Thornton to ground her cat in red instead of blue, Mrs. Dalton to give the village children an extra holiday, Margaret to wear heath instead of ivy in her hair, Walter to read out loud a pamphlet on the Corn-laws instead of an essay on Ecclesiology, and he was even known to carry a point with old Mr. Sydney about his plantation: a certain bank was planted with beeches instead of firs at his suggestion, although in the first instance the lord of Heron Castle had treated the proposal with unqualified contempt. There was something nearly irresistible in the childlike earnestness with which he pursued his object; there was something so *caressant* (no English word will do here) in his way of urging it: if the subject was a trifle it seemed so ill-natured to oppose him; if it was of consequence his whole heart seemed so set upon it; and thus he made his way, and had his way with every one, and every one liked him even better than they owned; and though Colonel Leslie sneered at the way in which others spoiled "that young Neville," he too was always glad to see him, would turn out of his way to join him in his walks, and he put off a party which had long been projected to St. Wulstan's Abbey, because Edmund, poor fellow, had a head-ache and could not go with them.

Margaret and Edmund were now examining the pictures in the

dining-room with an interest that seemed equal on both sides, for she loved them almost as the companions of her childhood, as the subjects of her day-dreams in later years, as the familiar images which had wound themselves into all the memories of the past. He seemed to enjoy them as one who could appreciate their merit as an artist, and he listened with interest to the family histories that were attached to some of them. They stopped some time before a portrait of Colonel Leslie which had been painted for Margaret's mother, just before her marriage. It seemed to rivet Edmund's attention; he gazed on it as if his eyes would never take themselves off it; Margaret spoke to him twice without rousing him, and when for the third time she asked him if he thought it like, he slowly answered "Very like" and still gazed on with undiminished attention. At last he turned away and said abruptly,

"How old is your father?"

"About forty-two, I believe," she replied.

"And you?" said Edmund, with a smile.

"Not *very* far from nineteen," she answered.

"And your sister?" he continued.

Margaret started; turned her large violet-coloured eyes full upon him, with a troubled and enquiring expression. It had been a dream of her childhood that she had a sister; she had a vague recollection of having once heard her grandmother say to her governess, when they thought her out of hearing, "Only think of that little Italian papist being *her* sister!" With that strange reserve which exists so often even in the most open-hearted and guileless children, she had kept this in her mind, and pondered over it, without ever speaking about it to any one, till by degrees the impression faded away, and was lost among the busy thoughts of daily life. As time went on, it seemed so unnatural that if she indeed had a sister, no one should name or allude to her, that she came to reckon this remembrance among the wild fancies which in hours of solitude so often take a form in the musings of childhood. Edmund's question seemed, as by an electric shock, to wake a train of thought in her mind, and her heart beat very fast as she answered,

"Years ago I once imagined that I had a sister somewhere abroad, but as no one ever mentioned her to me, I have ceased to think it possible. What then do you know of any sister of mine?"

"I was told you had one," he carelessly replied; "but I dare say I make some mistake; now show me the copy of Guido's *Spe-ranza*, which you spoke of the other day."

Margaret opened the door of Colonel Leslie's study, and led the way to the picture, but her heart was full; and turning suddenly back, she said to Edmund in an earnest manner,

"Will you please to tell me, Mr. Neville, when and where you heard that I had a sister? It would be such—"

She stopped short, and turned abruptly aside.

"Such what?" cried Edmund eagerly.

"Such happiness!" she exclaimed, with a passionate burst of tears. "I want a sister;" she continued, with great excitement. "They are all so good, so kind, so wise, those who love me, those I love; and Walter—dear Walter—I love him with all my heart; but they are too good, too wise, too patient with me. I want a sister to talk to, to laugh with, to quarrel with"—and she smiled through her tears.

Edmund seized her hand, and kissed it.

"Margaret! dear Margaret!" he began, "I have something to say to you;—something which day after day I have been longing to say to you. Will you listen to me now? Will you hear me, dearest Margaret?"

"No, no!" cried Margaret, starting up from her chair, while a crimson blush spread over her brow, her cheeks, her neck. "I never intended this—you have quite misunderstood me—I never meant—"

At that moment the house-door bell rang furiously; an instant afterwards, Colonel Leslie's step was heard on the stairs, and before the doors of the study were flung open, Margaret had disappeared through the garden entrance.

Edmund, with the most perfect self-possession, apologised for having invaded the study, and in the most leisurely manner returned to the drawing-room, where he found Mrs. Thornton's attention divided between the shading of pussy's tail, and explaining to Mr. Sydney the absolute necessity of investigating the bumps of children at the earliest period of their existence. Indeed, her feelings on the subject were so strong, that were she to have another child, she had much rather it was born without a head at all, than deprived of certain bumps which she deemed it incumbent on babies to possess.

We must follow Margaret to her own room, where she had rushed with the consciousness that something important had taken place, but without a clear idea of what had occurred during the last few minutes. Her hands were joined together and her head rested

upon them. She thought of the first earnest gaze of those piercing eyes which had since been so often fixed upon her's with an expression of intense interest, which haunted her by day and by night. She thought of the childish pleasure with which she had looked to Edmund's visit—of the childish exultation with which she had seen him follow her, seek her, watch her; and now something serious had come over the spirit of this dream. It seemed as if a spring had been touched which opened to her a new world. Was it the world of fancy or the world of realities that she was now entering upon? Had she been dreaming hitherto, and was she now awaking, or was it a new and strange dream that was taking possession of her?

She felt afraid—it was only a little nervousness—she lifted up her head, and turned her flushed cheek towards the window. She looked on the lovely landscape below, the broad glad river and the purple hills beyond; a little bird was fluttering wildly near the window. It seemed stunned at last, and lying on its back, gazed upward in silent terror. A hawk was hovering over it. Margaret watched it with intense interest, and when the bird of prey pounced on its victim, she gave a slight scream and shut her eyes. When she opened them again, two or three bright feathers, stained with blood, were lying on the gravel walk.

“Poor bird, poor little bird!” she said in a low tone, and her voice trembled.

“What nonsense is this? What is the matter with me?” She impatiently exclaimed, after a moment's interval, and drawing a deep breath, she shook off that strange oppression. A wild fit of gaiety succeeded it. She sat down at the pianoforte, and her fingers ran over the keys with triumphant rapidity. She threw open the window, and snatching a branch of laurel from the tree beneath it, she threw the shining leaves into the fire, and smiled to herself as the bright flame rose and the sound of a mimic artillery burst from them, such as had often amused her childhood. She moved from chair to chair, from window to window, opened every book on the table, and then threw herself into her low arm-chair before the fire, and gave herself up to a fit of musing, in which was acted and re-acted in fancy the short but important scene which had occurred in the study. Her cheeks again turned crimson as she thought that by her own unguarded expressions she had perhaps drawn from Edmund Neville an avowal of his feelings; she had checked that avowal in time to save her own self-respect, but would he ever ask her again to listen to him; or would he take her at her word, and

never woo her more? O no, her eyes,—and she looked up in the glass at those large dark mischievous blue eyes,—would soon bring him back to her feet; and she glanced at the fender on which the smallest feet in the world were resting; and the smile which played on her lips and which dimpled on her cheek would have been enough to bring back the most restive admirer from one end of the world to the other. “And luckily,” thought Margaret, and the smile turned into a laugh, “he is not yet at the other end of the world, and if he ever gets there, or away from Grantley, without asking to be heard again, my name is not Margaret Leslie, and I am not my father’s daughter.” And the spoilt little beauty left her room with as determined a step and resolute a countenance as if about to scale the walls of Badajos or the rampart of Burgos.

When Margaret entered the drawing-room, she found that Walter, for the first time, with the aid of a stick, had managed to reach it, and was established in a recess between the window and one of the huge fire-places of that old-fashioned apartment. She held out her hand to him and said gaily:—

“You must not get *too* active, Walter. I am half angry at seeing you out of your room. You will be taking flight to Heron Castle if we do not take care.”

Walter kindly pressed her offered hand, but did not reply in the same gay tone as herself. He asked if she had seen her father since his return.

“No,” said Margaret, and at that moment she remembered that instead of spending the whole day out as he had intended, Colonel Leslie had come home after an hour’s absence.

“Do you know why he did not go to Lord Donnington’s?” she asked.

“I fancy he met the postman between this and Herrington, and that taking his letters from him he found one that made him turn back. At least he said something to that effect as he crossed the hall to his study.”

The mention of the study recalled to Margaret’s mind the whole train of thought which had previously occupied her, and when an instant afterwards Walter put to her the same question he had done once before, three weeks ago, and in much the same tone and manner asked, “How do you like Edmund Neville?” it seemed as if he had read into her thoughts. She gave a slight start, and would have given anything to keep down the colour that she felt fast rising into her cheeks; but as that was impossible, she

turned away and stood with her back to Walter, while she answered in a hurried manner.

"I like him very much. Don't you?"

Walter did not answer.

"Don't you?" repeated Margaret, and this time she looked him full in the face.

"No;" was after a pause of a few seconds, his deliberate answer.

"No! And why not?" exclaimed Margaret, in a tone of so much disappointment, that it could not fail to excite his observation. A cloud passed over his face, and he was again silent. Margaret impatiently repeated her question; but she, in her turn, was struck with the suffering expression of his countenance, and sitting down gently by his side, she took his hand in her's, and in quite another tone, for the third time, asked—

"And why do you not like Edmund Neville?"

"Perhaps I am unjust," Walter said with an effort. "I may wrong him, but I cannot feel any confidence in him. I do not feel as if the truth was in him."

"Has he ever deceived you? Has he told you what was not true?"

"No; I cannot say he has; but he has none of that value for truth, that deep respect for it, which he must have in whose character I could place implicit confidence."

"This is a very vague charge," returned Margaret, in a tone of annoyance, "and hardly consistent with that charity which thinketh no evil, and which you are always inculcating upon me."

Walter coloured deeply, and leant his head on his hand, while she continued—

"You, who were once so fond of Edmund! You, who considered him, as you often told me, almost as your son! It must be some very strong proof of his unworthiness that can induce you to set his friends against him."

"His friends!" said Walter, with emotion. "Is friendship then the growth of three weeks standing? Are you the friend of a man whom three weeks ago you had never seen?"

"I made acquaintance with him under a false impression! I fancied he had been *your* friend; I am now undeceived; but I cannot follow you in your rapid changes of opinion, especially when you cannot account for them."

"You are severe Margaret, but perhaps just. God forgive me

if I have wronged Edmund; if I have misjudged him! I spoke hastily, and—but what do I see?—tears in your eyes, my child? Speak to me, dearest. Do not turn away from me.—I can bear anything but that. Tell me, Margaret, and forgive me for asking the question—as an old friend—almost a father—”

“Oh! if you were my father,” she exclaimed, clasping her hands together, “I would open my whole heart to you!”

“Do so now, Margaret. You will never repent of it. Trust to the assurance of one who has never deceived you, my dear child. Eighteen years ago, I stood by your cradle by the side of your mother, and loved you *then* for that mother’s sake. Can you not now trust me with your little secrets—your little sorrows, if you have any.”

“Sorrows, Walter?—Secrets?”

“Yes, a secret, perhaps; but hardly a sorrow, at least ten minutes ago it was not a sorrow.”

She sat down at the pianoforte, first played the notes, and then, in a low voice, sang the words of a little French song, which ended thus—

“Mon secret, mon secret, mon bonheur,
Il est là, il est là, dans mon cœur!”

She fixed her eyes on Walter as she finished her song, and their expression reminded him of those eyes which, in the days of his boyhood and early youth, he had so often gazed at from that very spot, and in the silence of his heart he promised his Mary in heaven, that he would watch over her child, and guide her on her dangerous way with as firm a hand, and as steady an eye as if he too was beyond the reach of human fears, hopes, and passions. It was a sacred vow, the fruit of one of those emotions which sink into the heart, until they deepen into action. Margaret turned over the leaves of her music-book, and then shutting it again suddenly, she looked up with gentle and earnest countenance; her voice trembled slightly, as she said—

“I will tell you the exact truth, Walter. I like Edmund Neville,—how much or how little I scarcely know myself. It is a strange thing to me to like a new acquaintance, a person of my own age, and one so unlike those whom I have hitherto so dearly loved—I cannot tell you how dearly, Walter,”—tears again rushed into her eyes; but she restrained them, and they only trembled on her dark eyelashes—“and now that I think he likes me; that he has all but told me so; I am afraid of him, of myself, and of you, Walter,” she

added, with increasing emotion, "for I see that my folly makes you unhappy. If it be so, Walter—if you really think ill of him—if, indeed, as you said just now, the truth is not in him, I will give up 'mon premier secret, mon dernier bonheur!'"

Walter rose and came to her side; his voice was perfectly calm, as he slowly and emphatically said—

"My dear child, I spoke without sufficient grounds when I accused Edmund Neville; I have no right to advance such a charge against him, and if you have seen that in him which has touched your heart, I dare not judge him!—I dare not trust my own aching fears—and yet—Margaret, my own dear child, beware!—Forget what I have said—think not of me, of my over-intense solicitude—but watch him—watch yourself—trifle not with a treasure of priceless worth—give it not rashly away—pause—and pray. I can say no more."

Margaret gave her hand to Walter who pressed it earnestly to his lips; both rose together and stood at the window, gazing at the black heavy clouds which were careering wildly across the sky, driven along by the same stormy gusts of wind that swept away before them the last lingering leaves of autumn. They did not speak; both their hearts were full, and both started when the voice of Colonel Leslie disturbed their reverie; he was standing at the door of the library, and his manner, if possible, still more stern and formal than usual, when he said to Margaret who had turned round and advanced to meet him,

"Will you be so good as to come for a moment to my room?"

She called one of the Newfoundland dogs that was lying on the rug, whispered to Walter as she passed him, "Look at Ebro's tail. I am sure it goes between his legs out of sympathy;" bent down a minute to stroke the old dog, and entered her father's room, to which she had never been invited before in that formal manner, or, indeed, in any manner at all.

Their relative positions had assumed an unfortunate character from the first moment of his return to England. On her arrival in London, her warm and impetuous feelings had been chilled by his cold reception, and unaccustomed to conceal her impressions, the reaction of his manner on her's had been so instantaneous that he had never discovered in her the least appearance of attachment to himself. He remained persuaded that prejudices against him had been carefully instilled into her mind by her mother's family, and he never, for a moment, imagined that she had been kept in igno-

rance of the facts of his second marriage, and of the existence of his youngest daughter. He was therefore often annoyed at remarks which she made in perfect unconsciousness, and which he attributed to motives which were entirely foreign to her thoughts; what he considered her determined silence on the subject appeared to him heartless affectation, and as his irritation increased, his reserve increased with it. Margaret, persuaded that he disliked her, did not set rightly to work, even in the supposition that this was actually the case. She was hurt at the coldness of his manner to herself, and provoked at his indifference to all her objects of interest, animate and inanimate; and she often put forward, in a marked manner, her English predilections and her English prejudices in a way that, supposing her to be acquainted with her father's history, would have been a want of feeling and good taste. One day especially that she was provoked by some sarcastic remarks which Colonel Leslie had made on English manners and habits, she exclaimed with warmth that "Bad as they might be, she never wished to adopt any others; and that a foreigner would always appear to her a creature of another nature than her own." Another time she spoke with marked dislike and contempt of Catholics, in a tone which Walter Sydney always checked, although he was not himself free from annoyance at the predilection, which, without professing it himself, Colonel Leslie evinced for the Catholic religion. On this last occasion he turned his eyes on Margaret with a stern expression, which soon changed into one of painful thoughtfulness and deep abstraction. These misunderstandings embittered all their domestic intercourse, and maintained in his mind a sense of resentment against those who were, as he believed, supporting Margaret against him, and keeping alive her prejudices against his absent child. It was in this spirit, and under these unfavourable impressions that the father and daughter met on the occasion we are adverting to.

He pointed to a large green Morocco chair, telling her to sit down, and standing himself opposite to her with his back to the fire, he cleared his throat two or three times and then said abruptly,—

"I have received a letter this morning, which obliges me to speak to you on a subject which has never yet been mentioned between us."

Margaret took Ebro's front paws and placed them on her lap.

"I know not," he continued, "what impression it will make upon you. Should it be unfavourable, I trust you will not let me perceive

it, for I would scarcely forgive any ungracious feeling on such an occasion."

To command graciousness is certainly not the most likely mode of obtaining it, and as Margaret bent her head down over the shaggy forehead of the Newfoundland dog, a slight rebellious swelling at her heart responded to this unlucky exhortation.

"You are, of course, aware that you *have* a sister?"

"Have I?" Margaret exclaimed, as her cheeks grew crimson, and her eyes filled with tears, and Ebro snatched away his paws which she had unconsciously pressed too hard.

"I cannot suppose," her father sternly continued, "that your relations have kept you in ignorance on this point; and among those moral obligations, in which, as I am assured, you have been carefully instructed, I should hope that the duty of receiving your sister with kindness and affection, may be prominent in your estimation." The tone in which this was said stung Margaret to the quick. If her feelings had been left to their natural course, she would probably have flung her arms round her father's neck, and exclaimed in a transport of delight, "Then, I have a sister! Let me see her! Let me go to her!" but her heart was swelling at that moment with indignant feeling at what she considered her father's injustice and harshness to herself; the joy, which that announcement would in itself have caused her, was swallowed up in her resentment, at the manner in which it had been made, and she answered with bitterness,—

"I have always loved those who love me; but for strangers, whether related to me or not, I feel nothing but indifference."

Colonel Leslie's brow darkened, and he answered sternly,—

"I regret to find that such are your feelings, but although *they* may not be under your control your *actions* are, and I must request you to bear in mind that on the manner in which you treat your sister, whose acquaintance you will soon make, will in a great measure depend my regard for yourself."

"I ought gratefully to accept *any* means that may serve to open to me the way to *your* regard!" as she pronounced these words, her emotion almost choked her, but she made an effort, an unfortunate one, for it was wounded *feeling* had begun the sentence, and it was irritated temper that finished it, and added—"however unwelcome in themselves they may be."

Colonel Leslie bit his lip, and said calmly, but with bitterness,—

"Allow me to hope that these *amiable* sentiments have been suggested to you by others. I suppose they are the result of the instructions which Walter Sydney has so sedulously bestowed upon you!"

Margaret's eyes flashed fire at this unjust insinuation, and looking her father full in the face, she replied,—

"You do not know Walter Sydney! you can never have known him, or you could not for an instant have supposed that anything but what was good and true and kind was suggested by him!"

Her energy seemed to please her father, and he looked at her with greater kindness.

"You do not perhaps know, Margaret," he said, "that there is a foul and noxious weed which can embitter and stain the purest and the sweetest fountains. *Prejudice* is its name, and one drop of it will turn to gall the milk of human kindness even in the gentlest natures. Walter's prejudices have so often taken the form of virtues, that at last they have become identified with them in his mind, and if you have imbibed them, I can only lament the day when I consigned you to his friendly care."

"I could almost find it in my heart to join in that regret," returned Margaret, "for it is perhaps dangerous to one's happiness to be loved with a tenderness which nothing can surpass, and to see before one, day by day, the example of a goodness which throws all other merits into the shade, and which makes the coldness and hardness of the world so strange and so repugnant."

"I am sorry to hear you have found the world so cold and so hard. Indeed I fancied you were only just out of the school-room, but these perhaps are Walter's phrases; as I would fain hope that some of your sentiments are borrowed from him."

"There is a phrase of his," she returned, "which I *have* noticed and remembered, 'The world is to each of us that scene of action where we meet with our first sorrows, and encounter our first temptations, and that may be in the solitude of our chambers, or in the midst of our family.' I have met with my world to-day."

She pronounced these last words so inaudibly that they escaped Colonel Leslie's attention, and he resumed in a dry and measured tone,

"As we cannot enter into each other's feelings, we had better confine ourselves to matters of fact. However unwelcome the intelligence may be to you, I must inform you that your sister will

soon arrivè in England, and of course soon after at Grantley. I trust that by that time you will have made up your mind to receive her, if not with affection at least with kindness.

The cold manner in which this was said wast lost on Margaret. Her face was hid in her hands, torrents of tears were forcing their way through her slight fingers, while her breast heaved with uncontrollable emotion. "My sister! My sister!" she repeated two or three times, and if Colonel Leslie could have read into the heart of his weeping and agitated child, he would have snatched her to his bosom, and the icy wall which had erected itself between them would have melted in the emotion of that hour like snow in the sunshine. But *Silence—Silence*—that fearful engine of good and of evil,—by turns the sacred guardian of our holiest feelings, the stern jailor of our purest impulses, or the seconder of our worst passions,—stood between them; and Colonel Leslie turned away and left the room with a clouded brow and a troubled spirit, while his daughter clasped her hands together, and with passionate vehemence exclaimed—

"Sister! Sister! I have yearned for thee by day, and dreamed of thee by night! and now the thought of thee has come like a dark cloud in a sunny sky. It haunts, it bewilders, it oppresses me. Dear Walter, come to me. Speak to me—*you* love me, Walter, *you* care for me. Never leave me, Walter!"

She looked up and Walter was by her side, gazing into her face with that anxious expression with which he always watched every turn of her countenance. That he should be actually there at the very moment when she was somewhat poetically addressing him in her excitement, turned the current of her thoughts, and a bright smile flashed through her tears, as she said—

"Walter, I think you are a magician. I have only to think of you, and you appear!"

He smiled also and answered—

"Why, Margaret, if it requires magic to guess when you want me, I plead guilty to the charge, for I know pretty well when my spoilt child requires her Old Walter to scold her for her tears, and to tell her at nineteen, what he told her at three, that crying is of no use, but to make people look ugly—"

"That is all nonsense, Walter. In the first place, I do not look ugly now. Do I?"

He could not say she did—bright tears were rolling down her flushed cheeks, like rain-drops on a damask rose,—“and in the

next place crying does one a great deal of good. It is like a thunder-storm. It clears the air."

"Then you must not speak as if I had nothing to cry about, Walter; an angry and unkind father is a real sorrow."

"Hush, Margaret. You do not mean what you say."

"I do mean what I say; and more than I say, too. I have a sister! I could love this sister with my whole heart! and this might have been one of the happiest days of my existence. Well, my father made me feel for a moment as if I hated that sister, and as if I was the most miserable of human beings. I can hardly forgive him for spoiling, by his unjust and harsh conduct, the happiness I might have felt at such a moment as this. I should not have wept, I should not have had this aching pain at my heart, on the day when I first heard of my sister. Why did you not tell me about her? I shall begin soon to think you unkind too, Walter."

"Perhaps I ought to have prepared you for this, Margaret, but your father's second marriage——"

"Stop—O yes—I understand—my head is so confused—yes, I see my father married again, or I could not have had a sister. When did he marry? Whom did he marry?"

"He married very soon after your mother's death, (a deep but quickly suppressed sigh was breathed by Walter as he said this) and his second wife——"

"Was an Italian, was she not?" interrupted Margaret, "why have we never seen her? Tell me all about it."

"We know but little on the subject, Margaret. She died two years after her marriage, and during her life-time there was little communication between your father and any of us. You know that with the exception of one short visit, he has ever since remained constantly absent, and he has never opened his lips to me, or, as far as I know, to any one here, about his second marriage. I did not feel sure, after so complete a silence, that even if his daughter were still alive, he had the intention of bringing her to England. As I thought you were ignorant of her existence, I did not think myself justified in speaking to you on a subject which might only have disturbed your mind, and concerning which I felt myself so much in the dark. Do you forgive me now?"

"Perhaps I do; though I think we might have puzzled over it together. My sister must be much younger than me."

"She must be about seventeen, I think," replied Walter; her birth was formally announced to us at the time."

"And what is her name? do you know that?"

"Ginevra, I believe. Her mother's name was Ginevra Ferrari."

"It is a pretty name. I wonder if she is pretty! I do long to see her! How differently I feel now from what I did when my father was speaking to me! It is like the reverse of that pretty passage in Tasso—

'Così a l'egro fanciul porgiamo aspersi
Di soave licor gli orli del vaso, etc.'

"The bitterness was on the edge of *this* cup, and the deep, deep sweetness within."

"I hope you will let your father see that you have found it so."

Margaret smiled, and pressed the tip of her tongue on her lips.

"I am afraid of tasting the bitterness again when I speak to *him*. But Walter, how glad I am I learnt Italian! Do you think that Ginevra speaks English? I shall be afraid of speaking Italian to her. What will grandmamma say to all this, and Mrs. Dalton, who thinks, I believe, that foreigners stand between English people and monkeys, as her favourite sea-anemones between animals and vegetables? But then, of course, papa's daughter is not quite a foreigner. Is she, Walter?"

What Walter answered to this was somewhat indistinct; and at that moment a servant entered to summon Margaret to the drawing-room, where some visitors had arrived, whom she hurried to receive with as much civility as was consistent with her extreme annoyance at their appearance. Walter followed her; and the new comers little dreamed, as for half-an-hour they made small talk to the inhabitants of Grantley Manor, that there was not one of them whose thoughts were not as distant as possible from country balls, parish meetings, and even boards of guardians, subjects to which Mr. Thornton was seldom wholly insensible, but which were now blended with visions of orange groves and black eyes, to him, indeed, far less attractive, but, at that moment, strange to say, more engrossing.

CHAPTER VI.

It will easily be imagined that during the days that followed the announcement which had created so much excitement at Grantley Manor, the arrival of the second or the Italian Miss Leslie, as she was more often designated, was the subject of every conversation, except when Colonel Leslie's presence interfered with their discussions. Before him it appeared a forbidden topic, and as he was the only person who could have given correct information as to the time and manner of that arrival, and as to the object of this intense curiosity, there was ample scope for every kind of speculation. Colonel Leslie seemed desirous that the present party should not break up; and from this Margaret inferred that he was anxious not to be left alone with her, at a moment, which both equally dreaded, and yet longed for. No words were again exchanged between them on the subject. She made a few timid allusions to it, in the hope of counteracting the false impression he had received from her manner on that first occasion; but he checked all approach to it with so much sternness and decision, that she gave up the attempt, and at last said to herself, with a mixture of impatience and satisfaction—

“Well, he *must* speak, however, before she arrives, or how will her room be got ready? and he does so hate talking to Mrs. Ramsay, that I think he will condescend to give *me* his orders!”

She was struck by the earnest manner with which her father pressed the Sydneys and Thorntons to prolong their visit, and with still greater pleasure she heard his invitation to Edmund Neville to remain with them till over the Christmas holidays, first faintly declined, and then finally accepted. Mrs. Thornton greatly preferred Grantley Manor to the Parsonage; she felt an ardent desire to be present at the arrival of Ginevra, (which event she often told her husband was the turning-point in their lives), but at the same time she would have wished to testify by her absence her utter disapprobation of the existence of such a person—indeed,

her unconsciousness of it—for as she had just assured Margaret, she could not admit the right of that foreign girl to be called Colonel Leslie's daughter in any sense, but that she happened to be his daughter; a fact which she would protest against as long as she lived.

"But as it is a fact, grandmamma," resumed Margaret, "you must make the best of it."

"I will never bow to facts, my love, when they go against my conscience."

Mr. Sydney, who was reading the newspaper in a corner of the room, laid it down to ask Mrs. Thornton what was the precise meaning of bowing to a fact.

Mrs. Thornton never hesitated; the readiness of her answers was quite remarkable, and it was with the most triumphant rapidity that she replied—

"To yield one's own opinions, Mr. Sydney, to the tyrannical force of material obstacles."

"Then I suppose you do not intend to expose yourself to the very material obstacle which Miss Ginevra's presence will oppose to your theory of her nonentity?"

"I shall meet her," returned Mrs. Thornton, with a deep sigh, "as something that exists, indeed, but which ought never to have existed." And having uttered this protest against any share she might have been supposed to have in so blameable an affair as Ginevra's existence, Mrs. Thornton felt herself justified in giving a dignified assent to the request that she would prolong her visit indefinitely, and Mr. Thornton, whose easy disposition was without difficulty reconciled to any scheme that was approved of by his wife and Margaret, offered no opposition to the plan.

The inhabitants of Heron Castle were more stubborn. Mr. Sydney positively refused; and it was at last arranged that he and his wife should return home for a fortnight, but promising to spend Christmas and the ensuing weeks at Grantley. Walter had stoutly resisted Margaret's intreaties that he would at once remain with them, and persisted in this resolution till a private conversation with her father secured the consent which she had vainly sought. During that interview words which had trembled on the lips of both during the last few weeks, found vent at last, and well nigh led to an abrupt termination of their early friendship; but both had checked themselves in time: both felt that the time was not come when they could explain, upbraid, or, above all, part. Too much was at stake

for both. It was not expediency, but a higher kind of prudence that prompted this feeling—the instinctive value each set upon the other's regard. Leslie was displeased with Walter, for he imputed to him what he believed to be his daughter's unamiable prejudices, and Walter was angry with him for what he considered his injustice and coldness to Margaret; but both felt that—

“They had been friends in youth—”

they knew that

“—to be wroth with those we love,
Doth work like madness in the brain,”

and they stopped in time, ere they had spoken words to each other which would have severed their friendship, and sent them each on their separate way in silent pride and unavailing regret.

When Walter, with a stubborn brow, persisted coldly in his intention of leaving the house on the following day, Leslie made a strong effort over himself, and said, in a thick, and nervous voice—

“If you will not stay for my sake, let it be for Mary's sake.”

Walter gave a start, pressed his brow with his hand, and struggled not to speak.

“It is not *she*” continued Leslie, with agitation, “who would have set one of my children against the other, and who, after sowing the seeds of enmity where love should have been, would have left me alone to reap the bitter harvest!”

“Leslie!” exclaimed Walter, with impetuosity, “do justice to your daughter, as you do to her long-forgotten mother, and you may think as hardly as you please of me. If you consider Margaret capable of one harsh or mean feeling—I care not who you suppose suggested it—you do her injustice, and you will some day have to answer for it. If you think *me* capable of setting her against your daughter—”

“Always ‘*my* daughter!’ Can you not call her—*her* sister?” interrupted Colonel Leslie, with bitterness.

Walter continued without noticing this remark—

“Why am I, who love her as you should have loved her, to stay and see what I frankly confess to you I cannot witness without impatience, the coldness and indifference with which you treat her; and to which there may, perhaps, be soon afforded a striking contrast.”

“Then stay!” returned Leslie, eagerly. “Stay, if such be your feelings, and warn her from pursuing a line of conduct which will

sever for ever those who should ever have been united. I can allow for the vehemence of your language, for I know, by painful experience, that to think those we love are wronged and undervalued is one of the bitterest trials to human nature. But do not imagine," here Colonel Leslie's lip curled with that sneer which had become almost habitual to his countenance, "do not imagine that I cannot admire that pretty, spoilt child, whom you have all fed with praises and nursed with homage, until you all, and herself among the number, call it coldness and injustice not to be in constant adoration before her. I do admire her; but I certainly wish she did not admire herself quite so much."

"I will not defend your daughter," cried Walter, warmly, "against a charge which you would not make did you know her better, or myself from that of loving her with the most devoted affection one human being ever felt for another."

"Walter," said Colonel Leslie, "I wonder you do not marry Margaret!"

Walter turned fiercely round. If Leslie had threatened to burn Heron Castle to the ground, or to ruin him by one stroke of his pen, he could not have looked as if a more mortal injury had been done him.

"Is this a cruel jest or a premeditated insult?" he murmured at last, with a knit brow and compressed lips.

"Neither, I assure you; but my position is a singular one, and I am beginning to be tired of it. It taxes my powers of endurance somewhat beyond their extent. Margaret throws in my teeth, on every occasion, your extraordinary perfections, which, it appears, disenchant her with all the rest of mankind, and you upbraid me for not idolising her very faults with a blind partiality, which, I confess, would become a lover more than a father or a friend."

Walter looked Leslie steadily in the face; his own was as pale as a sheet, and with a strong effort he said—

"Leslie, I give you my most sacred word of honour, that the idea of marrying your daughter never crossed my mind till this present moment. You have done me injustice, but I know you will believe my word."

"But in Heaven's name," exclaimed Leslie with impatience, "are you mad that you charge me with injustice at every word I utter. What have I accused you of? What crime have I laid to your charge, you most incomprehensible and intractable of men? Would it have been anything but satisfactory to me if my earliest

friend, if the man whom I respect most in the world, though he tries my temper more than any other, the heir of Heron Castle and the possessor of a large fortune, had taken a fancy to marry a little girl, whose blue eyes and red cheeks might plead his excuse for throwing himself away upon her? I acknowledge my error, and it was not necessary to undeceive me in so solemn a manner; but I really did suppose that you had made love to the child, and (forgive me if this is any reflection on your great superiority to the rest of mankind), that it accounted for that burst of enthusiasm with which she favoured me, and gave me to understand that we were none of us, myself among the number, fit to wipe your shoes."

"Leslie, we never understood each other, and now less than ever, if you cannot conceive that I would rather have died—"

"Than married my daughter? O, just as you please. The little coquette will, no doubt, have plenty of admirers, and in time a husband."

"I would rather have died," repeated Walter, with a voice that trembled with emotion, "than have spoken one word of love to the child whom you entrusted to my care, or have made one conscious effort to gain affection such as might not have been bestowed upon a father or a brother. Did you really think, as I saw her day by day, during those years of happiness, and all her young pure thoughts were opened to me without reserve, that I had turned that intimacy to account, taken advantage of her solitude, of her warm, affectionate, grateful feelings, to win for myself the treasure which you, and she whom you have once named to-day after so many years of silence, had given to me in charge? No, no! Thank God, that thought never crossed me; if it had, I should have flung it from me like a serpent. Though for some years past, I have loved her with the most boundless affection, and would gladly die to secure her happiness; though I feel now that your words have presented to my mind a vision of bliss which will disturb my peace, and may ruin my happiness; I do not the less affirm that if she were herself to come, and put her hand in mine, and with that calm look of confiding affection with which she has ever raised her eyes to mine, were to say, 'Walter, I love you, and I will be your wife,' I would tell her that she was a child, and that she knew not what she said nor what she did—the same words I used when twelve years ago, she put her diamond necklace round the throat of a little beggar who had seen it in its shining case and cried to have it. Now, perhaps, you understand me!"

Leslie wrung his hand, and turned aside in silence, but after a minute he said,

"It is all a mistake, Walter—you are as romantic as a boy, and will not see things as they really are; but it is not my business nor my intention to persuade you into marrying Margaret, though it would be but fair, perhaps,"—this was said with a smile which, for once, was not a sneer,—"that having spoilt her by such noble and self-denying affection as is rarely met with in this world, you should take her off my hands; but we will not speak of it again. Stay with us. You *must*, Walter. There is a trial at hand for us all. Memory is sore, and those moments are painful when life re-opens the wounds which time has closed but not healed."

These words did what they were intended to do. Different as they were, there existed the strongest attachment between these two men. Walter, especially, loved Leslie with all his soul. He was his oldest and dearest friend. When he had been discouraged and disappointed in early life, he had shown him an affectionate kindness which had never been forgotten. When Leslie married the woman he himself loved best in the world, no jealous or resentful feeling found place in his heart—and as he could not hate him, he only loved him better than ever, for her sake now as well as for his own. Mary's husband, the object of Mary's affection, became to him even dearer than the friend of his youth had been; the last words she ever said to him were, "Dear Walter, always love Henry;" and now when Henry, after a long absence and some estrangement, for the first time gave him a glimpse into his feelings, and that glimpse revealed much secret suffering, the affection and the memories of past years revived, and Old Walter was persuaded to remain at Grantley, and yielded a gruff assent to Leslie's last "You will stay then?" just as twenty years before he was taken out fishing or hunting against his will, and dragged from his beloved books or Mary Thornton's pianoforte by the same half-imperious and half affectionate compulsion.

On the evening of that day Margaret was sitting at the round table, near the fire, busily engaged in copying one of Flaxman's etchings of Shakespeare. It was the one in which Ophelia distributes flowers to the wondering and pitying courtiers; and she was deeply occupied, either with her drawing or with her thoughts, for, contrary to her usual habits, she had been silent for nearly an hour. Mrs. Sydney and Mrs. Dalton were playing at piquet, Mrs. Thornton was knitting in the arm-chair between the table and the fire, and

the two Mr. Sydneys and Edmund Neville were reading the newspapers. At last Walter put his down, and she said to him in a low voice—

“So, I find you stay after all?”

He nodded assent.

“That convinces me of what I would not at first believe.”

“What is that?”

“That you love my father better than me. Nothing would make you stay when I begged you, and now, after that endless conversation in the library, it is all settled!”

“Are you sorry for it?”

“O no; my dignity never interferes with my pleasure? It plays second fiddle to it on every occasion. Are you shocked?”

“That depends on what you call dignity. I have a dislike to that whole set of words — ‘Self-respect!’ ‘Dignity!’ ‘Proper pride!’ They are either the wrong names for Duty and Conscience, or they disguise, under specious terms, the very tempers against which Christians should struggle. But I do not approve of self-gratification playing the first fiddle, as you express it, on every occasion.”

“Oh, you are so hard on that poor persecuted self of our’s. Your own comes worst off, like a schoolmaster’s son that gets flogged oftener than the other boys that his father may not be accused of partiality; but that is no comfort to other people’s selves.”

“I thought you particularly admired self-denial, Margaret?”

“When I *read* of it, beyond expression. Do you remember my crying one day, when I was a little girl, because I could not be a martyr, and my asking you very earnestly if there was no hope of a persecution in our days?”

“No, I don’t.”

“Don’t you recollect it? and your advising me to drop some hot sealing-wax on my hand, and see if I could bear it without flinching, before I prayed that the days of persecution might return?”

“Tha was cruel, I think.”

“No; it was a practical lesson which I have never forgotten; it was at that time, too, that I gave Mr. Dempson the print of St. Lucy, which I wished him to hang opposite to that dreadful black leather chair of his.”

“Did he?”

“No; he did not think it would keep up the spirits of his pa-

tients, he said, and it would make them think him an executioner. But I always took my print with me when I went to that horrid room; and when I had lost one tooth, I did so admire St. Lucy for losing *all* her's. How do you like my drawing, Walter?"

"It is very pretty, but not the least like the original."

"I did not intend it to be. Do you know what engrossed me so much just now? I was trying to represent in this drawing the image I form in my own mind of my sister's appearance."

Edmund Neville looked up from his book, drew the paper on which Margaret had been employed towards him, and examined it attentively. She was still talking in an eager tone to Walter—

"Now, of six people who may be thinking at the same moment of Ginevra, I suppose that no two among us have the same idea about her—the same form before our eyes when we name her. I wonder if our fancies *are* at all alike—yours and mine, for instance! I wish we could all draw."

"We can *all* write," said old Mr. Sydney; and, drawing a bit of paper before him, he wrote these six lines—

"With eyes as black as any coal,
With cheeks as yellow as an orange;
With Leslie's nose, and Leslie's soul,
Just modelled into something strange—
Which English eyes will scarce approve,
And English hearts will never love."

Mrs. Thornton seized the paper, and read aloud this effusion with much emphasis, and a particular pause at the word *never*, much like what street-singers make in the last line of "Rule Britannia," when they assert that "Britons *never* will be slaves." Her conscience smote her, however, at this unqualified denunciation of eternal dislike to poor Ginevra; and she added, with a glance at her husband, and at Walter, who had coughed and fidgetted since the lecture of his father's verses, "Indeed, we *never* can love her with a natural love; but we will try to love her; even as a hen can love the duck she has hatched."

As Mrs. Thornton had in no sense, literal or figurative, hatched the youngest Miss Leslie, the comparison did not seem much to the point, but it satisfied her own sense of duty; that was enough for the moment. Margaret, however, seemed annoyed, and she bent her head over her portfolio with a heightened colour. When she raised her eyes, she met those of Edmund Neville. With a sudden em-

barrassment, she took up her pencil again without speaking. He said, across the table,

"You were about to say something. What do you think of Mr. Sydney's sketch?"

"That I am sure it is as unlike my sister, as the concluding sentiment is unlike what *I* feel about her."

As she said these words, she held out her hand for her drawing, which he had retained a few minutes.

"You have done something to it!" she exclaimed, hastily. "It is quite altered; but much improved."

"Nonsense," cried Edmund. "What odd fancies you have. I will draw the original of Mr. Sydney's picture;" and he sketched in ink a masculine, foreign-looking woman, with so striking a likeness to Colonel Leslie, and even a slight one to Margaret herself, that all those round the table were in fits of laughter; and the attention was directed from Margaret's drawing, which she put up in her portfolio a few minutes afterwards.

Since the eventful day in which a new page of life had opened to Margaret, she had felt the strongest conviction that Edmund Neville was in love with her. This persuasion gained fresh strength every hour, although he had never again opened his lips on the subject; but he watched her constantly; he appeared anxious on every subject to hear and to understand her opinions; he seemed desirous of speaking to her alone, but when the opportunity presented itself, he either abruptly withdrew, after a few insignificant remarks, or he became abstracted in thought. Margaret struggled against the increasing interest she felt in him, and, in compliance with Walter's request, she tried to pause, to watch him, and examine herself; but these efforts only served to prove to her how engrossing was that interest—how strong were those feelings. The more she watched him, the more she was convinced that he liked her; but, at the same time that it was impossible for her to doubt this, she sometimes felt chilled and disappointed at the mixture of coldness and hardness which accompanied the lively interest he so evidently took in her. When she sang, he seldom left the pianoforte, but it was with his head buried in his hands that he listened; and sometimes, after asking her for some particular song, he would suddenly walk away before it was finished. No day passed in which her heart did not at one moment swell with the consciousness of being loved, and beat with the hurried pulsation of joy at what seemed some unequivocal proof of affection, and in the

next sink with that faint sickening feeling of disappointment which a few careless words occasion when they convey the impression that the speaker's future fate and projects are in no way connected in his mind with our own. To Margaret, whose nature it was to reveal each passing thought, if not in words, at least by the expression of her eyes, or the tones of her voice, the restraint was almost intolerable; and when she had seen, or felt throughout the day, that Edmund had gazed on her for hours together—that if she spoke, he would, in listening to her, seem unconscious of the presence of others—and that a phrase, which he had begun in a tone of levity, would end with a sudden expression of feeling that seemed to promise a renewal of that explanation which she had once so rashly checked,—and yet when no approach to such a better understanding was really made, and he would announce some plan, or make some remark, utterly inconsistent with the vision which she had fondly conjured up—her manner involuntarily grew impatient and irritable, and assumed a character which was not natural to her; or, perhaps, to speak more truly, betrayed faults of character which were scarcely perceptible as long as the current of her life glided on without a ripple to disturb its smooth surface.

One day, when this had been the case, and that she had answered with petulance some trifling question that had been addressed to her, and left the room with a cloud on her brow, and the lines round her mouth curved into that shape which occasionally spoilt the perfect beauty of her face, Edmund turned to Walter, and asked him in a careless tone if Miss Leslie was ill-tempered. Walter turned a deaf ear to the question, and went on cutting a pencil at the wrong end. He would rather have died at that moment than acknowledged that Margaret was not an angel; but as angels do not frown and slam doors after them, he felt reduced to silence; but in a few seconds he said, in a calm voice—

“She has not been taught by sorrow the severe lesson of self-control. She must learn it some day, but woe to those through whom she learns it, if they deal not truly and gently with her.”

“I should imagine,” replied Edmund, “that your little favourite was more likely to sin against others, than to be sinned against herself.”

Walter raised his eyes doubtfully, and looked at Edmund as if he would have ascertained the exact meaning of those last words. He continued in the same tone—

“I should fancy that her sister will have rather a difficult part

to play here. Have you any idea what sort of person she is?"

"No," was the concise answer. There was another pause, and then Edmund laid his hand upon Walter's shoulder, and said in a low voice—

"I have a great mind to tell you what brings me here, and what keeps me here. You are the person, of all others, who will give me the best advice, and I know I can entirely trust you."

Walter's face underwent a sudden change, and he answered with an impetuosity which seemed to take Neville by surprise—

"You are wrong; you can neither trust *me* in this matter, nor can I trust myself to speak upon it. Put whatever construction you choose on my words. I care not what you infer from them, but I will not listen to one word on a subject on which I am not able to do justice to you, to myself, or to others."

As he said this, he snatched a book from the table, and hurried into the flower-garden, where, on her knees on the mould, Margaret was tying up some China-asters, which had hitherto braved the nightly frosts, but whose drooping heads hung down as if foreboding their approaching fate.

"Walter," she cried, "help me, to fasten these supports into the ground."

"It is of no use: you will catch cold: come in: leave those dying flowers alone."

"Poor things!" she said, lifting up their heads once more, and then letting them fall again, "They were looking so bright and so strong when I planted them three months ago. Walter, I wish time would stand still or go back, or do anything but go on."

"I thought I heard you wish exactly the contrary yesterday; you said, it never seemed to you to go fast enough."

"Don't quote me against myself, Walter; there is nothing so annoying. '*You said the other day!*' and '*Did I not tell you so?*' are the most provoking sentences in the world, and you are always using them."

As Walter looked grave and did not answer, she continued with increasing irritation. "Nobody can be expected to be always in the same mind, and to weigh every one of their words before speaking, unless they are very old, and methodical, and precise, and tiresome too."

As she spoke she sat down on the stone steps, and began twitching off the heads of the unfortunate asters which a moment before she had so much pitied and tended.

"You will make yourself ill, Margaret, if you stay here any longer. Pray come in."

"I am not cold, thank you. Pray don't stay with me if you find it cold."

Her flushed cheek did not belie her assertion. After a pause, Walter said—

"I pity your friends, Margaret, if they are to share the fate of those flowers. So much kindness at one moment, and such harshness the next."

"I have behaved ill to you, Walter, have I not? Oh! now I am quite miserable. I hate myself, and only wish that everybody would hate me too."

"That is still more unkind to me, Margaret, for you know that is the only thing I cannot do."

The tears sprang into Margaret's eyes; she held out her hand to Walter, and turned her head away. When he again pressed her to come home, she answered gently,—“No, dear, dear Walter, let me sit here a little while. The house is stifling—my head aches, and the air does me good.” In a moment Walter had brought from the house a large fur cloak, and wrapped her up in it, with the same care as if he had been dressing a baby; tying the strings under her chin, and clasping the collar so tight, that she cried for mercy, and then laughed; and then, when Walter said,—“Well, it is pleasant to see you laugh again,” she burst into tears, and all was right again between Walter and herself. As those bright tears fell fast on the dark fur of the cloak, the cloud seemed to pass away from her fair brow, and after a pose, during which he held her hand in his, he asked her in so gentle a manner what had disturbed and vexed her, that she longed to tell him—that she tried to tell him—but the words stuck in her throat. It seemed so very childish, so very foolish, she said; and there came another half-smile across her face, and a few more big tears rolled down her cheek. At last, with her eyes on the ground, and drawing patterns on the gravel with his stick, she murmured, “It is only that Mr. Neville said to Mrs. Dalton, before me, that he never would marry a short woman, and—and—I suppose I am short.” When she had said this, the colour rushed into her cheeks, and she exclaimed with impetuosity, “Do not laugh, Walter, do not laugh. I cannot bear it. I know how ridiculous it must seem to you. I suppose you think it is all childish nonsense. Sometimes I hope so myself,” she added, with a sigh, “but it makes my heart ache very much, whatever it is.”

Had she looked into Walter's face, she would have seen that it was unnecessary to warn him against laughing. She continued in a moment with increasing emotion, "It is wrong, perhaps, to acknowledge this sort of feeling—to let you see my folly, my weakness. I do not know how I can dare to speak so openly to you, but you know, Walter, how used I have been to tell you everything; and when you ask me in that kind manner what vexes me, I feel obliged to speak the truth."

"Always do so, my own Margaret. It is acting kindly by me, as well as justly by yourself. And may God give me strength always to deal kindly and truly by you!"

"How could you do otherwise?" she exclaimed. "What interest could you have in all this, but my happiness?"

"None, I trust," replied Walter, solemnly, "and, as long as you consider me as a friend, and a——"

"Father," she cried, and pressed his hand to her heart. It was the word he was about to use; but the readiness with which she suggested it, caused him a pang; but that pang was conquered, and he continued—

"I shall not complain of my little Margaret, or scold her for wishing herself as tall as even her favourite maid, Marian."

The gaiety with which this was said, was the most complete victory over self which Walter Sydney had yet achieved; and the triumph was entire when he looked kindly at the little beauty, as standing on tiptoe on the highest step of the flight, and dragging down to her level the coral-studded branch of a tall holly, she turned round and said to him, with one of her own bright smiles—"After all, I am not so very short."

CHAPTER VII.

A few days after the conversation that closed the last chapter, Colonel Leslie and Margaret were engaged to dinner at Lord Donnington's, whose house was about twelve miles distant from Grantley. Walter and Edmund were to dine there also, and Margaret looked forward with great pleasure to this rather unusual occurrence; as since her father's arrival, there had been very little intercourse between her and the neighbours. Lord Donnington's daughters were her only friends, and there was between them that sort of intimacy which usually takes place when girls of the same age have been in the habit, during their school-room years, of looking forward to spending the day, or drinking tea together, as to the dissipation and excitement of their otherwise monotonous existence. Maud and Lucy Vincent had been absent for some months from Donnington Castle, and had only returned a week ago from a tour in Italy. Margaret, who had not seen them yet, was very impatient to renew an intercourse which had hitherto been her greatest pleasure in life; and in her present state of uncertainty with regard to Edmund Neville's feelings regarding herself, she was not sorry to have an opportunity of observing him in more general society than her own home ever afforded. Frederic Vincent, Lord Donnington's eldest son, had been, as well as his sisters, a favourite companion in all her childish amusements, and she had always met him with pleasure in his successive holidays, even when, as an Etonian of fourteen, he was reckoned by his sisters the torment of the house and the plague of their lives. He had maintained his place in her good graces chiefly by his praises of her horsemanship, and his instructions in the management of the numberless pets to which she afforded her protection. This Frederic Vincent, now a young man of twenty-four, was at home again, after an absence of three years. He had joined his family in Italy and returned to England with them. Margaret had not, as far as she knew herself, or as it would be fair to suppose, any deliberate intention of exciting Edmund's jealousy, but, that some idea of the sort had floated vaguely in her

mind, it would not perhaps be safe positively to deny. As she finished dressing on that day, and looked at herself in the glass with some degree of complacency, a smile struggled out of the corners of her forcibly compressed lips, which told of pleasant thoughts and agreeable anticipations. When she found herself in the carriage, and, by the faint light reflected from the lamps outside, glanced at the faces of her three companions, she was struck by the contrast that their expression presented to her own radiant state of mind. Walter, who sat opposite to her, looked the picture of meek resignation. "Dear Walter," she thought to herself, "does not look to advantage to-night;" and so he certainly did not. He was much more smartly dressed than usual; and that sort of smartness which the unpretending are apt to fall into at the suggestion of others, was borne by the unconscious victim without any sense of the extremity of fashion imposed upon him. Then it was also intensely cold. Walter's eyes were red and his nose blue; and, above all, he was resigning himself to his unwonted dissipation with a meek endurance which would have provoked Margaret's laughter if her eyes had not at that moment rested on Edmund's countenance. The carriage was dark, but the outside lamps cast an uncertain light within, which revealed such an expression of gloom and ill-temper as she had never before observed on his features. His lips were moving rapidly, as if he was speaking to himself, and in a moment he drew from his pocket a thin and crumpled letter, and seemed to strain his eyes to read it by the flitting rays of light behind him. Twice he bit his lips, as if he would have drawn blood from them, and then thrust his head back into the corner with a jerk which indicated anything but repose of mind, whatever ease of body that position might give; and when Colonel Leslie, as a violent storm set in, and the snow began to fall under the horses' feet, muttered a curse on the English habit of dining out in the depth of winter, and wished himself and others, in no measured terms, anywhere but where they actually were, Margaret felt her joyous excitement flag, and looked with an anxious eye at the dark sky and the whitening appearance of the road. An impatient feeling crossed her mind as she looked at her companions. "Now if they would but be pleased!" she mentally exclaimed, "all would be right. What a pity people have not good tempers! How disagreeable they all are!" With this charitable thought, and the self-approbation which accompanied it, she also resigned herself to meditation in the corner of the carriage. After a weary drive of an hour and three-quarters,

the lights of Donnington Castle became visible, and Margaret's joyous "Here we are arrived!" roused her apathetic companions. In a few moments more the steps were let down, and the hall door thrown open. The drawing-room was full of people, and it took about five minutes for everybody to shake hands with everybody, and for the new comers to settle into the tacit discomfort which precedes the announcement of dinner. Margaret's two friends were as different from her and from one another as girls of about the same age could easily be. The eldest was pretty, and so small, that our heroine looked, by her side, what a few days before she had been so anxious to consider herself, *tall*; her eyes were black and very large, while her mouth was so small that it seemed as if it could scarcely open wide enough to admit a common-sized cherry. She was indisputably pretty; but yet there was something sharp and resolute in her features, which, had her figure been less diminutive, would have given her an unfeminine appearance. The other was tall, slight, high-shouldered and red-haired; you would have said she was exceedingly plain, if it had not occurred to you first to remark that it was impossible to see a sweeter countenance. This one was Lucy, and the short one was Maud. Both received Margaret in the most affectionate manner, and Frederic Vincent, who was like his sister Lucy, but only much better looking, seemed overjoyed at meeting her again; and, in her happiness at finding herself with her earliest friends, for one short instant she asked herself if the new feeling that had taken such tyrannical possession of her heart, might not, after all, be a mere dream which an act of volition could dispel.

She found herself sitting at dinner by Frederic Vincent, and she immediately entered into an animated conversation with him, having first, by a rapid glance, ascertained that Edmund was exactly opposite to her, and was seated between Maud and Lucy. She had that peculiar talent which some possess of appearing wholly absorbed in conversation with one person, while they can watch the proceedings of half-a-dozen others; and while she was questioning her neighbour about his travels, and laughing at his view of the hardships of family-travelling with four carriages and a fourgon—far more severe, he said, than anything he had encountered in Egypt or in Syria—she contrived to observe that Edmund was still paler than in the carriage, and that although he was in earnest conversation with the shortest of his neighbours, his voice was nervous and his countenance clouded. About the

middle of the second course, Walter, who was on the other side of Vincent, asked him a question about the Pyramids, which drew from him a long description, which, to her shame be it spoken, did not interest Margaret; and as Sir John Mortlock, her other neighbour, was nearly asleep, having had a hard run that morning, she was enabled to watch, with undivided attention, the conversation that was going on at the other side of the table. What was it that Maud's thin lips had just uttered, which had made Edmund turn so deadly pale that she wondered how she could have thought him pale at all the moment before? and what could it be, that had made him direct a sudden, searching, anxious look towards herself? That look vibrated through her whole frame, and her hand shook like a leaf. Thoughts darted across her mind in all sorts of directions, contradicting and condemning one another. Had Maud said anything against her? Shame on herself for the idea! Her best friend abuse her! Had she said, perhaps, that Vincent liked her, and that she hoped she would marry him? Nonsense! she would not say that to a stranger like Edmund! But what could it be? Certainly something had been said that had disturbed him. Now he has swallowed a large glass of wine, and his colour is returning. How flushed is his cheek! How Maud is talking to him! She never allows poor Lucy any chance of making acquaintance with people. What can that long story be that she is telling him? And why does Lucy, who never puts herself forward, seem so fidgety now, and speak to her sister across Edmund, and insist upon telling him something too, and that with a gentle look in her eyes and a scarcely perceptible glance at herself. Now Walter is satisfied about the Pyramids, and before he can proceed to the Holy Land, which he has a great mind to do, Vincent turns to Margaret and asks in a low voice—

“When does your sister arrive?”

This is a very interesting subject to Margaret, and one which diverts her thoughts more quickly than anything else could have done from her previous cogitations:

“Why, we do not exactly know. Papa said, on Monday, that she would arrive about the end of the week; so it might be any day, now.”

“O, really! as soon as that! Will Mr. and Mrs. Warren come with her to Grantley?”

“Who are they? I do not know anything about them.”

“Nonsense! why your sister is travelling with them.”

“I have never been told one word about her, except that she exists, and that she is coming. So leave off looking so surprised, Frederic, and tell me all you know about it.”

“About *it*? I can tell you about *her*, if you like. We have seen nothing else at Genoa.”

“You have seen Ginevra!” exclaimed Margaret, flushed with excitement and looking into her companion’s face with the greatest interest. Another keen and anxious glance was directed towards her from the other side of the table, and her heart whispered to her that Edmund was jealous. The thrill of joy which accompanied this impression, gave such a bright light to her eyes, and such a colour to her cheeks, that Vincent looked at her with admiration and forgot to answer her question, till an impatient “Well,” called upon him to speak.

“Well, she is a little like you, but on the whole very unlike any one I have ever seen.”

“But pretty, pleasing,—is she not?”

“Why—yes. I suppose so. I never felt quite at my ease with her. You must ask Maud and Lucy all about her. I dare say they will differ very much, as they generally do, and then you will make to yourself an idea of your own which will probably be quite unlike the reality. It is so useless to describe people. No description ever conveys a right notion of them to others.”

“You are very unsatisfactory, but you can at least tell me where and how you made acquaintance with her.”

“It was one day that we were sight-seeing at Genoa. We were going through the rooms of the Palazzo Rosso, when we met Mr. and Mrs. Warren, with whom we were slightly acquainted. They are relations of that Mr. Neville who came here with you to-day.”

“Oh, then, the people with whom my governess lived some years.”

“Exactly! Don’t you remember in what a scrape I got with her the last time I was at Grantley, by calling Mrs. Warren a bore?”

“Yes, I do; and I now remember she said they had been abroad for two years, and she had not heard from them for ages; but, go on.”

“Well, they were just looking at a magnificent Vandyke, the first Marquis of Brignole on horseback, and near them was a girl with her eyes fixed on this painting, and it struck me immediately

that I had never seen such strange eyes or such a peculiar dress."

"And it was Ginevra?"

"Yes."

"And what was her dress?"

"A perfectly plain grey gown—no bonnet or shawl—but what is called in Italy a mezzaro; a sort of veil which covers the head, and hangs down like a scarf."

"And her face?—now do tell me something of her face."

"I have told you I cannot describe it. It is placid and very pale. At times so pale and so still that she looks like a marble statue. Her eyes are of such a light blue that they sometimes appear almost colourless. Her hair also is of the fairest sort. The only dark thing in her face are her eyelashes. They are like a black curtain, and throw such a dark shade under those very light eyes, that it has the strangest effect possible."

"Then should you say that her face had no expression?"

"No expression!—why, it is the most expressive I ever saw; that is the peculiarity of it. Notwithstanding that extraordinary stillness of feature, she renders her thoughts, by the intensity of her countenance, in a way that is perfectly astonishing. Seldom does a muscle of her face move but a speck of colour rises in her cheek—and deepens and deepens—while her eyes brighten and seem almost to shine. They do not sparkle like your's, or like Maud's. Lucy says that you remind her of a morning in summer, and your sister of a moonlight night. I wonder what you will think of her! We met them very often, but I could never make her out. Lucy liked her, I think."

Margaret grew thoughtful, and after a pause, he added—

"How surprised we were when Mrs. Warren, after shaking hands with us, said 'Let me introduce you to Miss Leslie.' It immediately flashed upon me who she was."

"Do you happen to know how she came to travel with Mr. and Mrs. Warren?"

"I heard that when her uncle died, with whom she used to live, your father wrote to the English Consul at Genoa, and asked him if there was any English family there with whom she could safely travel home. He chanced to show this letter to Mr. Warren, who was slightly acquainted with Colonel Leslie, and he and his wife proposed to take charge of your sister—I believe that was the history of it."

"But Ginevra did not live at Genoa, did she?"

"No, I fancy she came from Verona to join them, but how very odd that you should not know more about it?"

Margaret was saved the necessity of answering this remark by the signal of departure which suddenly interrupted this conversation, and in a few minutes she found herself in a boudoir, which formed a kind of passage between the drawing-room and the conservatory, with Lucy Vincent on the sofa by her side, and Maud seated on a low stool opposite to them, with her face resting on her hands and her elbows on her knees. Those black piercing eyes reminded her of the dumb show which had excited her attention at dinner, and she remained somewhat thoughtful, till Maud exclaimed, as soon as the servants and the coffee-trays had disappeared—

"Are you not dying to hear about your sister?"

Margaret nodded assent, without speaking.

"Has Frederic been talking to you about her?" continued Maud.

"Yes he has—he says *you* like her," said Margaret, turning to Lucy.

Lucy coloured and said,—"*She* is so very attractive."

Maud bit her glove, and a strange smile crossed her features.

"Then Frederic thinks I do not like her."

"He did not tell me so. He says he cannot make her out."

"Really! Oh I think *I* do, but you shall judge for yourself. Mr. Neville tells me that you expect her in a day or two? How does your grandmamma like the notion of her coming?"

Margaret smiled and shook her head.

"You deal in signs to-day," Maud said; "will you promise me that if three weeks hence I ask you how you like your sister, and you are afraid of speaking plainly, you will give me one of these mute replies?"

"If I should not like her," Margaret said, more seriously than usual, "it will be so painful a subject that I shall not like to joke about it."

"Oh, you will like her, you must like her!" said Lucy, in a low voice.

"Now, really," exclaimed Maud, impatiently, "I cannot understand you, Lucy. You are certainly the most inconsistent person in the world, and if you go on in that way, I must say I shall think it right to speak out. I have no notion of all this kind of sentimental nonsense, and trying to keep people's eyes shut when the

best service you can do them is to advise their keeping them wide open."

Lucy bit her lip, and an embarrassing pause succeeded. Margaret felt pained and bewildered. Poor child! it was only since the last few weeks that she had known what it was to feel ill at ease, and she had not yet acquired the art of disguising that uneasiness. Life was beginning to weave around her that thin web of cares too intricate to be shaken off, and too slender to be noticed by others. Maud broke the oppressive silence by a remark which, though less painful and puzzling than the last, was not of a nature to relieve her tight-bound heart—

"Do you know, Margaret, that though we have had little time for gossiping since we arrived, yet we have contrived to hear the reports about you and Mr. Neville."

Margaret grew crimson; except in one single conversation with Walter she had never made or heard any allusion to this subject, and though there was something not disagreeable in the idea that others had observed Edmund's attentions to her, and that the result she had secretly and tremblingly anticipated was confidently expected by the neighbourhood, yet her hands grew cold, and her cheeks glowed, at this familiar and irreverent mention of what had hitherto been lodged in the deepest recesses of her heart. She answered in a faltering voice, that she had not been aware of the existence of such reports.

"But you acknowledge," said Maud, laughing, "that there is some foundation for them?"

"No, no. I do not, indeed. Indeed I am not engaged to him."

"Perhaps not, but about to be?" persisted Maud; and then added seriously, "I should be very glad that it was so, Margaret. Mr. Neville is immensely rich, at least he is the son of an immensely rich man, and those Warrens we met in Italy describe his father's place in Ireland as the most beautiful that ever was seen."

"And they say he is very amiable," observed Lucy.

The thought suggested itself to Margaret's mind, the involuntary thought, that amiable was not the word she would have used in describing Edmund. Charming—attractive—fascinating, but not *amiable*. No, even in his love (if indeed he loved her) there was a hardness, a stiffness, a want of consideration for her, even when he was most occupied about her, that was not amiable. But she was in love! Poor Margaret was decidedly in love—for it seemed

to her that had he been more amiable, less imperious, less uncertain, she would not have cared so much for each glance of his dark eye, or watched with such trembling anxiety for every proof of interest that his words or his actions might afford. Love does not always blind people. It often makes them keen-sighted, painfully alive to the slightest imperfections in the object of their attachment—but the faults and the failings which are discovered with even acute sensibility, are not hateful as they would be in another—they seem to form a part of what we love, and in our weakness we dare not wish to erase one line of the image engraved in our hearts.

Margaret was roused from these thoughts by her father's voice. He was standing at the door of the conservatory, and made a sign to her to come and speak to him. She went up to him, and laying his hand on her shoulder, he said, in a low voice,—

“I have ordered the carriage immediately. Your sister is arrived.”

Margaret looked up into his face. His eyes were full of tears. They were alone. She threw her arms round his neck; he pressed her to his heart, and she felt a hot tear fall on her forehead. Not one word was said, but much was understood in that hour.

When Margaret took leave of Lady Donnington and her daughters, her face showed the traces of deep emotion. When she went down stairs to the carriage, Walter and Edmund both hurried to support her, but it was Walter's arm that she took. A new phase in her life was beginning, and it was to him who had walked by her side, and watched her with loving eyes from the day of her birth, that she was not afraid to show the tears that were streaming down her cheeks, or to betray the agitation of her soul by the tremulous pressure of the arm she held. She got into the carriage, her father and Walter followed her, the door was closed. She exclaimed in surprise,—

“Is not Edmund coming?”

“No,” said Colonel Leslie; “he has just told me that he is going to sleep at Earldon Park—Mr. Warren's place. We are to send his servant to him there.”

“Does he come back to-morrow?” asked Walter. How grateful Margaret felt to him for that question.

“I don't know,” was the answer; “he did not say.”

Her heart sank within her, and she bitterly regretted the sudden, and now it seemed to her unaccountable impulse, which had led her to turn from him and to take Walter's arm. He had appeared

anxious to speak to her. He would have probably told her when he should return— she would have had something definite to look to. She almost twisted off the finger of her white glove in her vexation; she would have liked to quarrel with Walter for having offered to take her to the carriage.—“What want of tact to thrust himself forward!” Bad, ungrateful, unjust thought! It was checked at its birth, and Walter’s hand was seized, to his great surprise, and pressed between Margaret’s, with a sudden emotion which he ascribed to her agitation at the idea of her approaching interview with her sister. Colonel Leslie explained to them, in a few words, that a letter which Mr. Warren had written to him from Dover, announcing their arrival, had been delayed on the road; that in the mean time they had travelled faster than they expected, and that about an hour after they had themselves left Grantley, the travelling-carriage had arrived there. Mr. and Mrs. Warren had gone on to Earldon, leaving Ginevra in Mrs. Dalton’s care, who had instantly despatched a groom to apprise Colonel Leslie of his daughter’s arrival. After this communication the silence remained nearly unbroken as the carriage rolled along. To Margaret the next two hours seemed interminable, and she thought the old coachman had never driven so slowly before. When they passed the lodges of the park, the great stable-clock was striking eleven, and the well-known sounds of the dogs barking, and the hall door opening, had never been so welcome yet to Margaret’s ears. She looked for her father as the butler was pulling off her cloak, but he had turned aside and darted into his study, closing the door behind him. She walked straight to the library, but found it dark, and then recollected that she did not know which room her sister was to inhabit; she called the servant and asked him. He said Mrs. Dalton had not thought it proper to decide till the Colonel’s arrival, but he believed that the lady’s things had been taken to the chintz bed-room. Margaret ran up the oak stair-case, and found her governess with a flat candlestick in her hand on the landing-place.

“O, where is she?” exclaimed the breathless girl.

“In your father’s room, down-stairs, my dear. She was with me just now; but when she heard the Colonel’s voice asking for her, she was off like a shot. He was at the bottom of the back-stairs, and she seemed to know her way by instinct. They were in the study, and the door closed, before one had time to turn oneself round.”

"I suppose I ought to go down—I wish my father would call me. Tell me quick, Dally!—do you like her?"

"She seems a very nice young lady; but, dear me, she is so much taller than you! Who *would* have thought that?"

"I must go," said Margaret, and she went down the stairs that led to her father's room. She expected to be called; she thought the door must open soon; she heard them speaking—she did not feel courage to open the door. She waited—nobody stirred—a low murmur was all that reached her ears; her heart began to swell, and a sense of pain and irritation to oppress it; tears came to her eyes, and were with difficulty kept from flowing. The night was intensely cold, and as she stood on the stone floor of that passage, the physical sensation seemed to correspond with the chillness that was creeping over her heart. "I can bear it no longer!" she exclaimed, and turned towards the stairs with the intention of shutting herself up in her own room, and giving vent to her feelings; but as she mounted the first step, it did occur to her that it was possible that the fault might be on her side—that knowing where her sister was, it might be expected that she would rush to her without waiting to be called—she returned, and after a knock that was not answered, gently opened the door; she saw no one, but by the lights on the carpet perceived that those she had come in search of were in the further room, a sort of inner recess within the study. With a throbbing heart she drew near, but stopped for an instant, overpowered by an unconquerable timidity. Her father—her cold stern father—was standing before a picture, which, since his return, had hung in that place, but had always been covered with a curtain. It was now drawn aside. Supported in his arms, with her head resting on his shoulder, was the daughter of the woman whom he had passionately loved, and whose image was before him. His long suppressed feelings had given way. It was an hour of uncontrollable emotion. The past and the present seemed to meet in that instant. A torrent of recollections—of sweet and bitter memories—rushed upon him, and in that tongue which had been familiar to him in his days of happiness, but which, for years, had found no utterance—in that Italian language which had been to them for so long but as the music of a dream—he poured forth, in a broken voice, the remembrances of past grief, intermingled with the joyful emotions of the present hour.

"Idol! Treasure! Best gift of Heaven!" he exclaimed, as he folded his child to his heart, "Ginevra! my Ginevra! Do I breathe

again, in human hearing, that name which has never passed my lips for years, but as a cry of anguish. My own, my precious child, call me your father, or say, once—once only, ‘my Henry.’ No, do not say it; they were *her* last words, and no one, not even you, my angel, must utter them in my hearing.”

A low sweet voice was murmuring in his ear, the child he had held in his arms sank on her knees by his side, her lips moved, her eyes turned from the mute canvas before her, first to Heaven, and then on her father’s agitated face. The colour that had deepened in her cheek died away, her head was bent still lower than before, and her tears fell fast on the hand on which her brow was resting.

What was Margaret feeling the while? She was there in the presence of a father, and of a sister, unheeded, unnoticed, unthought of. A strange foreign tongue was in her ears; and the gestures, the tones of impassioned feeling, were as new to her as the language which gave them utterance. She felt with indescribable bitterness that she had no part in their emotion, that neither in the past nor in the present was she anything to her father; her sister appeared to her as a being from another world, who had taken possession at once of an affection of which she had been unjustly deprived. Had she not also had a mother? In her own little room, had she not often wept in silence as she gazed on her gentle features, and had a father’s tenderness ever soothed or consoled *her*? These thoughts hardened her heart. She hurried back through the study, rushed to her own room, closed the door, and gave herself up to the bitterness of her feelings. She would shut her heart against those who cared so little for her; she would not intrude upon them with any troublesome fondness, and may be, she would soon leave home, which would never more be to her the home it used to be. She should probably soon marry Edmund Neville, and go to a new family, to new scenes, and to new friends. Walter must often come and see her : she could never bear to be long separated from dear Old Walter; but as to Grantley—she did not care about Grantley; it was all spoilt to her.”

At that moment she drew the curtain and unclosed the shutter, and she was rivetted by the wintry beauty of the scene before her. The moon was shining brightly, the snow-storm was over; but the thick flakes whitened the whole space between the house and the river, which, locked in its icy prison, reflected the lights of the millions of stars that were twinkling in the clear frosty sky. On

the leaves of the laurels, and on the more distant beeches, the snow hung in fanciful shapes and graceful outlines, and formed a bed of dazzling whiteness on the ledge of the old-fashioned window where she was standing.

"My home! my English home!" she exclaimed aloud, "what do they care about you—those who make me wish myself away? After all (now an evil spirit at her side espied the favourable moment to suggest a bad thought, which easily took root in the ground which irritation and discontent had prepared)—after all, I do not see why I should wish myself away, or take my father's indifference so much to heart! I am the eldest sister. Grandmamma has often told me that I am the heiress of Grantley, and of all that surrounds it. Ginevra is the stranger here, and if I chose to make Grantley uncomfortable to her, I could do it far more easily than she could annoy me."

At that moment, there was a low knock at the door; Margaret started, and in a trembling voice, said—

"Come in."

She had gone through so much during the last few hours, that she was nearly overpowered by her agitation. She felt by an instinctive impression that it was her sister who had come to seek her; a sense of faintness came over her, and as she was crossing the room to meet her she almost fell. In an instant she was caught in Ginevra's arms, who placed her gently on the couch, drew her close to herself, twined her arms round her own neck, laid her aching head against her breast; and while the eldest sister sobbed as if her heart would break, the youngest soothed her with murmured words of affection, even as if she had been addressing a weeping child.

Margaret felt as if a mother was speaking to her, a strange repose stole over her heart, she wept freely when a soft hand was laid on her forehead, and a gentle earnest kiss was pressed on her burning cheek. The Evil Spirit fled, the icy cord that had bound her heart gave way; she raised her head, smiled through her blinding tears, looked at a face which might have been an angel's, and again hiding her's in that sheltering bosom, murmured—

"Sister, O sister! are you come at last? Not the one I have expected for a few weeks, but the one I dreamt of years ago."

Another soft kiss was pressed on her cheek, and Ginevra said—

"Do not talk, now, sister—your hands are cold, your cheek is

burning—I know your head is throbbing —My own ! I know you are suffering ; you must lie down and rest.”

It was true that Margaret felt very unwell ; but it was a strange comfort, to cling to her new sister, to yield to her wishes ; to suffer her to help her to undress ; and then, when she laid her head on her pillow, to look up into her face while she bathed her aching temples. She felt bewildered at the extraordinary reaction of her feelings, at the strangeness of her position. Was that really the sister whom a few moments before she had thought of with such bitterness ? But, no, she must be dreaming ;—if it was indeed Ginevra, and it was the night of her arrival, ought she not to be waiting upon her, to be nursing her ?

“ Sister,” she exclaimed, rousing herself for an instant, “ you have come a long distance to-day ; you must be tired. What are you doing here ? ”

“ Resting—dearest—by your side. I should like to stay here all night, watching you sleep.”

“ No, no,” cried Margaret, “ you must not stay. Go, sister, go ; but let me see you to-morrow when I wake. I shall be so afraid of having only dreamed of you. It is so strange ; but I feel as if I had seen your face before. Kiss me again, before you go.”

Ginevra bent over her sister, kissed and blessed her, and then sinking on her knees by the side of the bed, she said, in a low voice—

“ Sister, shall we pray together ? ”

Margaret put her arm round her neck, and drawing her close to herself whispered in her ear—

“ Are there prayers that we *may* say together ? ”

“ The one that God himself made,” answered Ginevra, and her soft low voice repeated the Lord’s Prayer, and as the Amen fell from Margaret’s lips a heavy sleep closed her eyes.

Ginevra prayed some time longer by her sister’s side ; she prayed in silence, and now and then printed a fervent kiss on the hand that was unconsciously detaining her’s. A low knock at the door roused her from this position. She gently disengaged her hand, reluctantly yielded her place to Mrs. Dalton, and then retiring to her own room, remained for two hours with her face buried in her hands and absorbed in thought.

CHAPTER VIII.

At the time of her arrival in England, Colonel Leslie's youngest daughter was about seventeen years old, but she looked older, and was much taller than her sister. Both had small aquiline noses, high foreheads, very much rounded at the temples, dark pencilled eyebrows, and thick eyelashes; but while Margaret's eyes were of the hue of the violet, or of the hyacinth, those of Ginevra were of the colour of the forget-me-not, or rather of that blue which lies sometimes between the crimson clouds and the burnished gold of a gorgeous sunset, a blue which puts to shame the azure of the rest of the sky. Her hair was fair, and her cheeks were pale; her mouth was the only feature which was decidedly prettier in her than in her sister; it was full of sweetness and gentleness. Her face was calm, but it was the calmness of a smooth sea—still, but not dull—quiet, but expressive. When she came down to breakfast on the morning after her arrival, all eyes were turned with anxious curiosity on the young girl who was a stranger in her father's house, but had come to take there a daughter's place. Her timid step, her likeness to Margaret, the expression of her eyes, at once dissolved all the prejudices that had been conceived against her, and when she turned from her father to Mr. Thornton, he held out both his hands to her, kissed her forehead, and said, "God bless you, my dear girl," in a tone of mingled effort and kindness. Mrs. Thornton's embrace followed, and then Walter shook hands with her with a cordiality which he had not imagined he should feel, or have been able to show. Colonel Leslie's eyes often wandered from his newspaper that morning; he did not speak much to Ginevra, but when she spoke, he listened attentively. As he saw his two daughters sitting together on a low couch in the drawing-room, before a table covered with books and work and flowers, their two pretty heads close together, Ginevra's arm round Margaret's waist, and Margaret's cheek resting on Ginevra's shoulder—as he saw their eyes fondly turning to one another, and their hands often busied at the same piece of tapestry—as he heard the sound of

their young voices, and the frequent peals of Margaret's joyous laugh, he drew a deep breath, and the weight of a mountain seemed removed from his breast. That day, and the next, and the next, were spent by the sisters in the enjoyment of a new found happiness, new to both, and apparently welcome to each. There was an extraordinary similitarity in their destinies; neither of them had known a mother, a brother, or a sister; and with different characters, different educations, and different previous associations, both had longed for those ties of kindred which no other affections can replace. It was a pretty sight to see Margaret wrapping a fur cloak round her pale sister, persuading her into the pony chaise, or coaxing her into the sledge, and looking at her side like a damask rose by a lily—it was pretty to see Ginevra weave the green-house flowers, the graceful fuchsias, or the many-coloured heaths, into garlands, which each day she placed on her sister's fair brow—it was pretty to see them read together, to watch them at their Italian lessons, or with their English books before them, correcting each other's mistakes with childish pleasure, and chiding each other in sport—or in the old library when the twilight was closing, the shutters yet open, and the fire burning brightly, to hear Ginevra sing the songs of her own land, while Margaret sat at her feet, and warbled a second, as she caught the melody of those wild strains.

"Sister," the eldest would say, as they sat up at night in each other's rooms, "sister, we must travel very fast over our past lives, and be in a few days like old sisters who have always lived together."

And then she would tell Ginevra how happy she had been as a child, how kind everybody had been to her, how Walter Sydney had always loved her, "and tried to make himself into a mother, a brother,—even a sister," she would say, laughing at the contrast between him and the real sister she had found.

"You have been very happy then, always, dearest?" the other would reply.

"Yes, the happiest child in the world; but I suppose a child's happiness cannot last."

"Have you found that out yet, sister?"

"Guessed it perhaps;" and Margaret bent her head over the flowers which she had just removed from her brow.

"Have you been happy Ginevra?"

"Sometimes," was the answer, and then she added quickly,—

"Tell me more about yourself, my Margaret, my *Reine Marguerite*," she said, and gazed fondly on the face of her sister, while she drew from her the little histories of her past life, the expression of her sentiments, the statements of her opinions. She listened to her with unwearied interest, she responded with the keenest and most delicate sensibility, she threw a charm over these conversations, and their daily intercourse, which removed all constraint and embarrassment. Margaret was fascinated and subdued by the magic influence of that quiet and most intelligent sympathy; but at the same time she felt baffled in her efforts to obtain from Ginevra the same unlimited confidence which she involuntarily placed in her; and after a few days had elapsed, her impression was that she had never met with any one who understood her so well, or whom she understood so little, as her younger sister. She was so unlike any one she had ever met with before, and all those about her seemed to feel this; even Mrs. Thornton, who generally was surprised at nothing, wondered that she could not dislike Ginevra. She tried to tell her that there was nothing in common between them (not specifying whether she meant the room they were to sit in, or the subjects they were to talk about), and the unaffected interest which Ginevra took in her grand-children, in her poor people, in her garden, forced her to acknowledge the contrary. She told her that English people could esteem foreigners, perhaps love them, but never get identified with them. Ginevra felt no wish to be identified with Mrs. Thornton, but with a sweet smile, said, "she would not claim more than her affection, but would never be satisfied with less." As Mrs. Dalton observed, "she did everything well, great and small, important or insignificant," and Margaret could bear to hear this, and she could bear too to hear her sister reply, when, one day, she had asked her if she felt at her ease with their father—

"O yes; when I am with him, I often think of the beautiful words of scripture, 'Perfect love casteth out fear,' and I think it is so with this purest and holiest of human affections."

"Do you indeed love him thus?" she exclaimed, "then no wonder that he has no affection to spare for me."

The tears sprung to her eyes, but afraid of being misunderstood, she hastily added,—

"Do not mistake me, Ginevra. I once thought I should be jealous of you; but all that gave way at the first sound of your voice, at your first kiss, my own sister, and I shall never," she continued,

as Ginevra looked at her with anxious tenderness, "never repine that I am not the favourite, if you will but love me as I know he loves you."

The days went by, and Margaret wondered how she could have lived without Ginevra, so necessary did she now appear to her happiness. She was not, however, completely satisfied that she *made her out*, as Frederick Vincent would have said. There was an evident reluctance to enter into conversation on subjects personal to herself, that sometimes puzzled and almost provoked Margaret.

"Can you persuade yourself," she one day said to Walter, "that Ginevra is only seventeen?"

"Why she looks very young, does she not?"

"Yes; but she is so wise, so wonderfully wise! I wonder if it is all real. She is like somebody in a book; and yet I should as soon think my Italian 'greyhound affected, as my new sister. Such strange thoughts come into my head, Walter, while she is talking to me. Sometimes I think of the scripture text, about entertaining angels unawares; and then again she puts me in mind of that beautiful stanza of Coleridge,

" Her slenders palms together prest,
Heaving sometimes on her breast;
Her face resigned to bliss or bale—
Her face! O call it fair, not pale—
And both blue eyes, more bright than clear,
And each about to have a tear."

Margaret had read this passage out loud, and as she put down the book these two lines caught her eye—

" He who had seen this Geraldine,
Had thought her, sure, a thing divine."

"What an extraordinary poem this Christabel is," she exclaimed—"like a bad dream!" Her head rested on her hand, and with the astonishing rapidity of thought, her mind reverted almost at the same instant to Maud Vincent's mysterious hints and advice to herself. "What could she mean by 'opening my eyes?'—and why did Lucy seem so vexed at her saying so? Lucy is the best of the two, though not the cleverest; but Maud is the most affectionate,—at least the fondest of me. She used to wish me to marry her brother; perhaps Lucy wants him to marry Ginevra, and Maud meant that all the time." And then, the next link in the chain of thought brought her to wonder (not for the first time) that several

days had elapsed, and that Edmund Neville had not re-appeared, or, as far as she knew, written to announce his return. She felt some curiosity about his relations the Warrens, but neither her questions, nor Mrs. Dalton's investigations, drew from Ginevra more than the assurance that they had been very kind to her; whether she liked them, whether she wished to see them again, what sort of people they were, and many other similar inquiries met with nothing but evasive and unsatisfactory answers. The interest she felt about her sister, and the amusement she found in her society moderated for a while Margaret's uneasiness at Edmund's protracted absence, and still more extraordinary silence; but at the end of a week she grew painfully alive to it, and watched for the hour of the post, the casual arrival of a note, the ringing of the house-door bell, and the sound of wheels or horses' feet in the avenue, with a keen anxiety, which was very evident to Walter, and did not wholly escape the observation of others.

One morning as she was coming out of her room, she saw Ginevra at the end of the gallery on which her own opened, with a letter in her hand. She was reading it attentively, with one knee resting on the edge of the window seat. She seemed very much absorbed with its contents, and there was a speck of colour in her pale cheeks. Margaret walked up to her and put her hand on her shoulder. She gave a violent start, and turned quite pale, and when her sister said, with a smile, "I am afraid I have startled you very much," the colour rushed back into her face, and she trembled visibly.

"I hope you have had no bad news from Italy," said Margaret, while Ginevra hastily folded the letter in her hand and thrust it in the folds of her dress.

"O, no;" said Ginevra, mournfully. "I have no news to get from Italy: my only remaining friends left Verona some months ago, and since my uncle Leonardo's death, and Father Francesco's departure for America, the links that bound me to my native land have been severed one by one, and Italy,"—she continued, with a voice of more emotion than she had ever yet betrayed, "and Italy is nothing to me now, but a tale that is told—a dream that has been dreamt—a prelude to the life that is now beginning."

"A happy life, I trust," said Margaret.

"Thank you, sister, thank you," answered Ginevra, in a voice, that without any apparent reason to herself, affected Margaret; her manner was at once tender and abrupt, and she left her suddenly.

That day, at breakfast, Colonel Leslie told his daughters that he had written to Mr. Warren to propose to him and his wife that they should come to Grantley for a few days, and that he had just received a letter announcing that they would arrive the next day. Ginevra gave no signs of interest at this intelligence; but Margaret looked earnestly at her father, with the expectation that some communication about Edmund would follow. She was not disappointed. "Neville," he said, after a pause, "has also written to say that he will return here to-morrow. He has been delayed, day after day, at Earlsdon, by some matters of business." Walter looked up from the "Times" at that moment, and saw the flush of joy in Margaret's eyes,—sudden, bright, and dazzling, it played on her face, and seemed to vibrate through her frame.

Walter had suffered much from his childhood upward, in the midst of what, to all appearance, would have been deemed a calm and prosperous life. With many sources of enjoyment in his pursuits, and in his tastes, he had seldom met with sympathy in others, and there had been in his breast a store of ardent and passionate feelings which had never found full scope. He had learnt that lesson which either softens or hardens a man's heart—that in his strongest affections he must not expect a return, that his life must be one continual self-sacrifice, and his own happiness consist in the happiness of others—he had early learnt this lesson, and well did he take it to heart; long and steadily did he practise it. To guard Margaret Leslie from the least touch of evil, and, if possible, of sorrow—to watch that the breath of heaven played not too roughly on her cheek, or not a stone lay in her path that he could remove—had been the aim and the joy of his existence. He often forced himself in calm self-discipline to scan his feelings, to interrogate the past, and anticipate the future. He thought of her marriage, he pictured her to himself in the enjoyment of domestic happiness—in the performance of domestic duties—and he could breathe an ardent prayer that he might thus see her, and never wish to be more than her friend unless, years hence, her affections should be blighted, her heart chilled, or her spirit broken. Then would be his time; then—then—he would bind up these wounds, and pour into them the balm of a love that had known no change, and warm what the cold breath of the world had chilled at the undying flame kindled in silence and nurtured in self-devotion; he had no fear that five or ten or twenty years could dim its brightness or subdue its ardour. There was one question that Walter often

asked himself in his stern self-examinations—why was it that, if indeed he had no hope for himself, and no care but for her happiness?—why, when she sat by Neville, and looked into his face as if the destiny of her life was written in his glance, and she lived only in the sunshine of his presence?—why did he, so resigned and self-forgetting, long to tear her away from him, to thrust him aside, and to clasp her to his own heart, as a bird rescued from the snare of the fowler. He fought with himself—he struggled in silence—he forced himself, in imagination, to place her hand in Neville's, to think of her as Neville's wife; but an imperious, overpowering, inward voice seemed to forbid him, even in thought, to sanction this marriage; and, in Old Walter's heart, there were conflicts sustained which were little dreamt of by those who saw him engaged with his architectural designs, or his benevolent schemes, or, as at the moment we are speaking of, with the leading article of the "Times" newspaper.

During the whole of that day, and of the next, Margaret was in a state of great excitement; she had not before spoken to her sister about Edmund Neville, but now she not only mentioned him once while making some arrangements about the rooms their guests were to occupy, but she often reverted to the subject, and Ginevra listened with patient interest. Once when Margaret had requested her to take into Mrs. Warren's room a nosegay which they had been making up together, she followed her upstairs, and not finding her in the room which she had pointed out, she opened the door of the next, which was the one that Edmund had occupied all the time he had been at Grantley. Ginevra was standing by the writing-table and examining the blotting-paper book. She was turning over the pages with a look of interest, and holding it upside down, she carried it to the light, and seemed employed in making out some indistinct traces of writing. Margaret felt an annoyance, greater than she quite understood, at seeing her thus employed. With that feeling of reserve and delicacy which by nature and by education she was particularly alive to; earnestly as she would have wished to visit that room after Edmund's departure, and to detect and find pleasure in the most trifling traces of his presence, she had never ventured beyond the door, or even supposed it possible to gratify such a wish. Ginevra put down the book, and moving towards the chimney, stood a moment gazing at the fire, and then walking away and meeting Margaret at the door, started and coloured, when she said to her, "You have put

the flowers in the wrong place." Ginevra turned back in silence, took up the vase of flowers, and followed Margaret to the south bed-room.

As the latter turned round to speak to her sister, she was struck by the expression of her countenance. It was, as usual, very still, but painfully anxious; and, as they both laid hold at the same time of a geranium blossom that had escaped from the vase, Margaret almost started at the cold, damp, nervous touch of her sister's hand. She longed to ask her if she was well, but it was difficult to speak to Ginevra of herself. Easy to get on with, as she generally was, and alive, even to a singular degree, to the cares and interests of others, she shrunk, not ungraciously, but with the manner of a sensitive plant when handled, from any inquiry about her own health or her own feelings.

As Margaret entered the drawing-room that evening, she found her grandmother already seated in her arm-chair; and Mr. and Mrs. Warren, who had only arrived just in time to dress, came down a few minutes afterwards. She was a plain insignificant looking woman, with a soft voice, and a common-place manner; a long residence abroad had given both to her and to her husband a distaste to their own country, without attaching them to any other. He was, on the whole, a kind and good-natured man, but had fallen into the grievous error of supposing that to be fastidious was a proof of refinement, and to be impertinent a mark of distinction. He had thrown himself into an arm-chair, and bowed coldly to Mr. Thornton and to Walter when Colonel Leslie introduced them to him, and seemed to doubt, for a while, if he should treat Margaret with supercilious indifference, or with condescending familiarity. Her beauty probably decided the question; and as he took her in to dinner, he said to her, as if he had known her for years,

"Don't you quite adore your sister?" and then, scarcely waiting for an answer, addressed Ginevra in Italian across the table.

There was a vacant place by Margaret, and a few minutes after dinner was begun, Edmund Neville glided into the room, and took possession of it. It seemed to her an age since they had met, and she could scarcely disguise the sudden increase of spirits which his arrival occasioned. He too seemed very happy, and began talking and laughing with greater animation than usual. He begged Mrs. Warren to tell Mrs. Thornton everything about the cold-water system, in the happy conviction, as he whispered to Margaret, that her grandmother would soon wrap all the cottagers in wet

blankets; and he at the same time suggested to Mr. Thornton to secure Mr. Warren's interest for the new turnpike on the North Road. When these topics were set afloat, and the sound of voices enabled him to speak unheard, he whispered to Margaret,

"Ask your sister a question; for I want her to look this way."

"Nonsense! she is talking to Walter, and I will not disturb them. I wish them to be great friends."

"Really! do you think they will suit?"

"O yes, I am sure of it; but he is so shy, and she is so reserved, that they have not made much acquaintance yet."

"She is reserved, is she?"

"Yes, in some ways she is. There is no making her talk of herself."

"That is not a common fault," said Edmund, with a smile.

"Is she not beautiful, Mr. Neville?"

"How can I tell, if you will not make her look this way?"

"You must have patience till after dinner, and then I shall introduce you to her."

"O no, thank you, I hate a formal introduction. You will see that I shall contrive to introduce myself. How have your grandfather and grandmother received her?"

"O, as kindly as possible—particularly grandpapa; and yet, he had a great deal to get over. He could not endure that papa should marry a Catholic and a foreigner."

"Prejudices are stubborn things, no doubt," replied Edmund, "but affections are stronger; and when they clash, the first go to the wall—How do Walter's stand?"

"They are quite of a different sort from grandpapa's; but, I believe, he fancied he should not like Ginevra, and—"

"I think he likes her very much, now; don't you? Look how they are talking. Can you hear what it is all about?"

"Cathedrals, I believe. Tell me how did you like the Vincents, the other day?"

"Which of them?"

"Maud."

"About as much, I suppose, as you liked her brother."

"I like him very much."

"Exactly: I thought so; well, I liked her very much. She is a sort of person who would toil to gain her end, and never rest till she had gained it; and I honour such people."

"Why, that should depend on what their aim is."

"Not entirely. There is something great in fixity of purpose, in a strong will and a dogged perseverance, even when there is nothing good or great in the object aimed at."

"Such a *will* as that might make a man more criminal than great," answered Margaret, with some animation. "There is nothing admirable in mere strength of purpose, when it is the result of pride and the instrument of tyranny."

"Moral strength may be the result of pride, but not the occasion of crime—not of debasing, mean crime, at least."

"O, Mr. Neville!" exclaimed Margaret; "is not everything that is ~~w~~rong, more or less vile?—is not guilt always selfish, and selfishness always mean?"

"I do not call that a mean selfishness, which makes a man trace out for himself a destiny, and be true to it and to himself, even though he may have to sacrifice others in his efforts to reach his end. There is something that belongs to a high order of character in the determination to conquer obstacles, and sweep away whatever lies between us and our object. Depend upon it, Miss Leslie, a scrupulous nature is never joined to true greatness; a man who weighs every word before he utters it, will never be eloquent, and he who debates upon every action before he performs it, will never be great. There is a moral instinct that carries a man through life far better than what are generally called principles."

"How different your ideas are from Walter's! He, too, admires strength of will, and steadiness of purpose, but he says that the will of man is a fearful power for good or for evil, and, if not rightly directed, may start aside like a broken bow, and destroy himself and others."

At the mention of Walter's name, Edmund had rapidly glanced at the side of the table where he sat, and it was some moments before Margaret obtained his attention, and the conversation was resumed.

"Do you think," he asked her after a pause, "that one person can long withstand the *will* of another, when there exists that fixity of purpose which we were speaking of just now, in one of the parties engaged in a trial of strength? Don't you suppose that intense volition, even if it stops at any guilty means of success, must triumph in the end over passive resistance?"

"I do not understand you."

"Suppose, for instance, that the happiness of my whole life depended on conquering the will of those I had to deal with—in

obliging them to act according to my ideas, and not according to their own—do you not think that, granting equality of mental power, my indomitable will must conquer in the end ! ”

“Walter would say that it depended on the justice of your cause, and, failing that, on the nature of the resistance you met with.”

A dark shade passed over Neville’s face, and he said abruptly,

“For heaven’s sake tell me what *you* think, and not what *Walter* says.”

“I think as he does; but I am not as good as he is, and that is why I quote him. I hate talking as if I was better than I am; it is like hypocrisy, though not so really. Living with a person of very high principles and of exalted goodness, is apt to make one good in theory; we fancy ourselves like them, till something proves to us that we are only *electrotyped*,” she said, pointing with a smile to a piece of plate of that description which stood before them.

“You are right,” answered Neville; and there was another pause. “Miss Leslie, if somebody you cared very much about, whom you loved with all your heart, was to thwart you on the point nearest to your heart, would it alter your feelings?”

With a trembling voice she answered,

“If I loved any one with all my heart, I should have no heart to set on anything else.”

The usual bright glance of her eyes was changed to one of timid and diffident anxiety as she looked at Edmund’s thoughtful face. He seemed more absorbed in his subject than in her, and went on—

“Your devotion, then, to the person you loved would be such as to conquer all obstacles?”

“Always supposing that nothing wrong was required of me.”

“Oh, of course,” rejoined Edmund impatiently. “Let us always suppose that, and not make conventional speeches.”

“I have never yet been accused of making such,” returned Margaret with a mixture of gaiety and annoyance. She, who of all human beings had hitherto been the most fearless, to a degree that would have amounted to boldness had she been less feminine in appearance and in reality, was beginning to feel the tyrannical power of a strong affection, conscious of its own existence, and uncertain of requital; the rising and sinking of her spirits, the colour of her cheek, and the quicker or slower pulsation of her heart, turned upon the gay or the troubled glance of Neville’s flashing eyes and

the curved lines about his most expressive mouth. Her last words had evidently displeased him, and he maintained a gloomy silence, till the moment that the ladies left the dining-room.

"What do you think of my nephew?" asked Mrs. Warren of Ginevra, as they all stood before the library fire. "I did not imagine that we should meet him at your father's house."

"You thought he was in Ireland," answered Ginevra, who was attentively examining a group of Dresden China figures.

"He is a great favourite with us all," observed Mrs. Thornton; "quite a tame cat in this house, or an *enfant de la maison*, as foreigners say. I beg your pardon, my love, for talking of foreigners before you——"

"It is because you do not consider me quite as a foreigner, I hope," interrupted Ginevra, gaily. Mrs. Warren laughed, and said,

"You must dress a little differently from what you do now, if you wish to be taken for an Englishwoman."

This was true; for the excessive simplicity of Ginevra's dress was as unlike as possible to what would have been worn by any person accustomed even to the most domestic life in England. She was in mourning, and her black gown with its long waist, its hanging and picturesque open sleeves, the plain velvet ribbon round her neck, and her hair braided in innumerable tresses, but without a single ornament, made her look very like an old picture, and very unlike an English girl of seventeen. She blushed slightly and said,

"Margaret will teach me."

"Why, Colonel Leslie was so enthusiastic about *your* dress at dinner, that he will perhaps persuade Miss Leslie to imitate you."

"And why should Margaret imitate any one?" Mrs. Thornton began, in a tone that alarmed Margaret; for, to be the object of her grandmother's comments was her particular horror, and she dexterously turned the subject of conversation by holding out to admiration the old lace scarf which Mrs. Warren wore.

When the doors of the dining-room opened, the two sisters were sitting together on a low couch, employed in winding some worsted. The skeins of crimson wool were thrown across Margaret's extended hands, and Ginevra was holding in hers the ever-increasing red ball. At that moment it escaped her grasp, and rolled half-way across the room. Neville, near whom it fell, picked it up, and brought it to Margaret. She said, with a smile,

"Give it to Ginevra."

He remained a minute standing before her, and with a half-smile on his countenance. She blushed, and held out her hand for the ball. He detained it a moment, till she had lifted up her eyes to his; he then smiled outright, released it with a very civil bow, and then, sitting down on the other side of Margaret, whispered,

"Now, I think, I have introduced myself."

He seemed to have quite recovered his spirits and his good humour, and was more agreeable than ever that evening: it was perhaps one of the happiest that Margaret had ever spent; Edmund seemed so fond of her, and so rejoiced at finding himself once more at Grantley; there was even something gentler and more affectionate in his manner than had ever been the case before. Once, when she had been speaking to him of her happiness in having found a sister, and *such* a sister! and had exclaimed, in her enthusiasm, "Does she not seem more like a creature from some other world than one belonging to ours?" he seized her hand, as he once had done before, and murmured in a low voice, "You are an angel of goodness and of tenderness." The full tide of joy rushed upon her in that instant, and made her heart beat with tumultuous emotion. It was also a pleasure to her that Edmund should appear to advantage in Ginevra's eyes. She had begun to look up to her, and to feel a conviction of her great mental superiority, which made her anxious that she should appreciate and admire him. She was almost provoked at her not taking more part in the conversation that evening. Once or twice she was unusually animated, but at other times appeared thoughtful and abstracted. When Mr. and Mrs. Warren and Walter joined them, the conversation became general.

"How do you like the appearance of our charming country?" Mr. Warren asked of Ginevra.

"Very much," she replied; "but its look of business and activity almost frightens me. What becomes of idle people in England? Do you kill them like the drones of the hive?"

"In England," said Walter, "idleness is treated as a crime in the poor, and is punishable by law; in the rich the law takes no cognizance of it."

"But it often brings its own punishment with it," interrupted Margaret. "The rich are often bored to death with their own idleness, and so come to be considered and treated as bores by others. A day of real idle ennui is more fatiguing than one of hard

labour; and to be thought a bore is worse than to be thought wicked—”

Walter frowned, but she persisted.

“You know very well, that being thought wicked *does* not make one wicked; whereas, to be thought a bore, is, in fact, to be one; so the first does not signify, and the other does.”

Mr. Warren and Edmund laughed, and Ginevra shook her head.

“Do you not miss the Italian sun dreadfully?” said Mrs. Warren, in a drawling tone.

“O no,” answered Ginevra, “not yet, and not here. There is a sunshine in this house (she glanced fondly at Margaret) that makes even a dull sky turn bright,—and a heavy heart feel light,” she added, in so low a tone that none heard those concluding words, or detected the sigh that accompanied them.

“I am afraid your sunshine will be like beet-root sugar, Signora mia,” observed Mr. Warren, who had not understood her allusion, “and only satisfy those who have not known the genuine article, as the phrase goes. I only wish I had never been in Italy. It spoils one for life.”

“Do you mean that it has spoiled you or your life?” asked Edmund.

“My friends must judge of the first point, and I of the second. O for a day of Italian warmth and gaiety!” he exclaimed, with an expressive shrug and groan. “You, Edmund, who have never been beyond the Alps, and only dawdled among those horrid Swiss chalets and glaciers, can have no sympathy with my yearnings for the ‘land of the south, the clime of the sun.’”

“Does the Italian sunshine,” said Edmund, “still form *improvvisatores*? Is that gift of inspiration still to be found among the Italians?”

“A qui le demandez-vous,” cried Mrs. Warren; “the Signora Ginevra is an *improvisatrice de la première force*, and when the spirit of poetry moves her, she can pour out her thoughts in verses which will stand the test of criticism.”

“Is it possible!” exclaimed Margaret. “O dear Ginevra, let us hear you now—to-night; it would give us such pleasure.”

Ginevra gently refused, and Edmund whispered to Margaret, “Tell your father to ask her.”

She eagerly appealed to Colonel Leslie, who looked at his youngest daughter, and said aloud, “She will, if she can.”

In an instant she rose and went to the pianoforte, played a few

chords in a hurried manner, and fixed her clear bright eyes on her father; one of her hands was raised to her brow, and with the other she continued a low modulation on the keys. All eyes were fixed upon her.

Mr. Warren said, "You must give her a subject." There was a general silence; at last Walter said, "I will propose one—Hope or Fear."

"*Hope and Fear*," said Margaret.

In a moment the colour rose deeply in Ginevra's cheek, and the light in her eyes seemed to shine with dazzling brilliancy. The moment of inspiration was come. Her glance wandered from her father's face, and appeared to rest on Neville's. His was fixed on her with earnest expectation. She spoke not, the colour faded from her cheek, and the hand that had been raised to her brow fell slowly on the keys. In a moment she began playing, and the low uncertain hurried tones which she drew from the instrument, seemed to express the vague instinctive approaches of a dawning apprehension. The melody changed into wild notes that oppressed the soul like the spell of an increasing terror; they rendered, with a mysterious power, the acuteness of agony; and then, as the sound of rain on the parched ground, or as the small cloud in the sky when the earth is famishing, a few faint notes, the returning whispers of hope in the soul, rose and fell in strange alternations, now swelling like the breeze on the sea, now dying away like the expiring murmurs of a distant storm, till at last one sudden, triumphant, exulting burst of melody resounded in the ears, and re-echoed in the hearts of the listeners. Again and again rang that victorious peal, with so clear, so thrilling, so transporting an accent, that Walter, covering his face with his hands, could only find vent for his emotion by uttering those words which express the last and sublimest triumph of hope over fear—"O Death, where is thy sting? O Grave, where is thy victory?"

The last notes of that glorious harmony had died away, but seemed still to float in the silent air, and no one spoke or moved, so deep was the impression produced, till Ginevra herself rose, and walked away from the pianoforte. Margaret kissed her without speaking; Mr. Warren called her St. Cecilia; Mrs. Thornton began telling Mrs. Warren, in a low voice, what a wonderful talent for music Margaret had, but that for her part she had never wished her to be a Muse, or an Improvisatrice, or a St. Cecilia, or anything of that kind.

"Why did you not speak as well as play?" asked Mr. Warren, after a pause.

"I did what I *could*," she answered, with a glance at her father.

Edmund Neville, who had been sitting opposite the pianoforte, and had not moved since she had begun playing, suddenly crossed the room and sat down by her. They spoke together for a few minutes in a low voice. Margaret thought he was praising her talent, and wished she could play like her, or praise like him; for there was an expression in his eyes that she had never seen before, and which she ascribed to the magic power of genius. And could she wonder that he felt its influence, when there was not a nerve in her own frame that was not thrilling with admiration and excitement under the resistless spell of that bewitching harmony?—and could she wonder that her sister listened with a look of agitated and intense interest to the eloquent words whose power and whose charm she knew but too well? She did not wonder, but perhaps she trembled. Perhaps a vague apprehension crossed her mind in that moment, faint as the first notes of Ginevra's melody; but it was soon swallowed up in the happiness of the next hour, for Edmund came and told her that he had finally resolved on furnishing and inhabiting Darrell Court, an old house in the neighbourhood, which had belonged to his family for many hundred years, and which his father had given up to him. He made her promise to drive over and see it on the first fine day; he consulted her on various points connected with his projects, and asked her advice, and praised her taste, and sketched designs, and described balustrades, till the cloud that had for an instant hung over the brightness of that happy evening passed away from her heart and from her brow, like a light vapour from a sunny sky.

CHAPTER IX.

The next day but one was Sunday; Ginevra had gone early to the Catholic chapel at Marston, and only returned after the vesper service. It was getting dark when she reached home, and after hastily kissing her father and her sister, she shut herself up in her own room. At the usual hour that they sat together before dressing time, Margaret glided in, took her place on the low stool by the fire, and began playing unconsciously with the beads of her sister's rosary, while Ginevra, drawing some white and pink camellias from a basket at her feet, arranged them in a wreath.

"You see I did not forget my visit to the green-house," she said, while proceeding with her task : "I mean this wreath to be my *chef-d'œuvre*. What have you been doing to-day, Margaret?—since church, I mean."

"O nothing," said Margaret; "we generally take a long walk in the afternoon when there is no service, but everybody objected. Walter was lame again, and Edmund Neville cross. I cannot conceive what put him out. He was in such spirits yesterday, and to-day he has been looking as black as thunder, and hardly spoke to any one. I do not like people to have such uncertain tempers. Do you, Ginevra?"

"No," said her sister gently; "but in this perplexing world, dear Margaret, it is hard to tell whether it is suffering or temper that clouds the brow, and oppresses the heart. To be always calm is to *some* impossible, to *all* difficult," she added, while a scarcely perceptible sigh escaped her.

"I believe you are the most perfect person in the world," exclaimed Margaret, raising her eyes from the fire to her sister's face, which was paler than usual.

Ginevra started, and laying her hand on Margaret's mouth, said eagerly, "Never say that again, dearest;" and while she placed the last bright flower among the shining leaves, she continued, "and never judge hastily; never condemn harshly, but remember how

little you know of life, and of its trials. May you never meet with any but what God sends you! May you never make any for yourself, for such are the hardest to bear! Pray for those who suffer. They may be sorrowing saints—they may be repenting sinners; but if they suffer, you cannot do amiss in praying for them. They need it so much. There now, let me put this flowery crown on your head. I have made you thoughtful with my sermon, but lay it to heart, my sweet sister; learn to weep with those who weep, and may others never have but to rejoice with you!”

When the sisters met again in the dining-room, Edmund was seated next to Margaret. He, at first, seemed unable to rally his spirits, but by degrees he grew excited, and his gaiety, which was usually quiet, was almost boisterous. This continued in the evening; and, in the course of conversation, he began talking again of Darrell-court, and pressed Margaret to go there the next day. She turned to Ginevra, and asked her if she would like it; and was rather disappointed when she answered coldly, that Mrs. Warren wished to see the place again, and would, she knew, gladly accompany her.

“Are you quite determined to settle there?” asked Walter in a moment.

“*That*,” replied Neville, “depends on circumstances over which I have no control. I am in the hands of others, and on their decision turns the happiness or misery of my life.”

He said this with a flushed cheek and a hurried manner, and his words produced an instantaneous effect on his three hearers. Walter turned pale, for he saw before him the crisis he had so long anticipated; and Margaret felt her heart beat with joyful emotion as she now foresaw, that in the home of his ancestors, in his own future abode, he would open his heart to her, and claim the acknowledgment of her love in return for the avowal of his. She glanced timidly at Ginevra, and perceived that her cheek, her brow, and even her temples, to the very roots of her hair, were suffused with a deep blush, which proved that she, too, must have seized the allusion, and how clear its import must have appeared to her. Recovering herself from her agitation, Margaret proposed to go and consult Mrs. Thornton and her father on the intended expedition, and Edmund eagerly urged her to do so.

“Mind you succeed in arranging it,” he exclaimed, as she rose from her place. “You know I cannot bear to be thwarted, and will *never* forgive you if your negotiation fails. I have so

much for you all to do at Darrell-court. You, Walter, must undertake the chapel."

"And what do you intrust to me?" said Mr. Warren, who had joined them.

"The dining-room and the picture-gallery."

"And to me?" said Margaret, who was lingering at the door of the music-room.

"The flower-garden, or the breakfast-room."

"And to my sister?"

Edmund turned, and trying to catch Ginevra's eye, said gravely—

"Will she choose for herself?"

But as she did not answer, he addressed himself to Walter, and begged him to show Mr. Warren the engravings in the library, from which he was to select a design for a new window in the chapel of Darrell-court.

"My uncle," he said, "is not, I believe, much of an ecclesiologist, but he is a good judge of anything connected with art."

Mr. Warren, with a manner that implied that he would do the designs the honour of looking at them, followed Walter into the library. Margaret, in the meanwhile, went up to the whist-table and while Mrs. Sydney was dealing very slowly, she explained her plan for the next day, or rather announced it. She met with no opposition; only Mrs. Thornton assured her, with a sigh, that she had herself become a mere nothing in the family; that she was at the mercy of everybody, and washed her hands of it. Of *what* she washed them would have been difficult to find out; but she repeated the expression energetically two or three times, and then applied herself to the sorting of her cards.

"So you are going to help Mr. Neville to take possession of Darrell-court," whispered Mr. Thornton, so audibly that Mrs. Sydney started and mis-dealt; "and what if he was to ask you to do so for good—what should you say to that, Miss Margaret?"

"Nonsense, grandpapa! what very odd ideas come into your head!"

"Which never by any chance come into your's, Meg—heigh?" A kiss on his mouth was his grand-daughter's answer, and she hurried away in search of Colonel Leslie.

Later in the evening, as she was sitting by Walter in the library, Ginevra joined them. Suddenly Margaret recollected that she had not given Edmund an answer about the next day's proceedings, and,

not sorry to have a good excuse for returning to the drawing-room, she left Walter and her sister alone together. He raised his eyes from the portfolio he had been examining, and they met those of the young girl who was sitting opposite to him. He had felt an increasing interest about her during the last few days. Like most reserved persons, he had a quick insight into human feelings, and having often suffered in silence himself, he easily detected the marks of silent suffering in others. That she was unhappy *now* he could no longer doubt. He had sometimes fancied before that her eyes had filled with tears, which a firm resolution had alone restrained from flowing, but now he saw them stealing down her cheek faster than her hand could brush them away. He addressed to her some trifling observation, and her mouth quivered when she attempted to reply. There was not a shade of temper in her face; but it was evident that she was struggling with a powerful emotion, and steadily endeavouring to subdue it. Walter's prejudices would not have been easily conquered, had this young girl appeared happy, or had she, on her arrival among them, displayed a childish or ungracious sorrow; but as it was, she was suffering, and she was struggling. The source of that suffering he knew not; where she found strength to struggle he discerned not yet; but he longed to soothe that pain, and to help those efforts, as he would have longed to feed the hungry or to shelter the naked. He pushed the portfolio towards her, and said—

“Have you seen these engravings?”

She looked at them at first in silence; but by degrees grew interested, and then animated. A print of St. Peter's Martyrdom seemed to fix her attention; she said, in a low voice, as her head was bent over it—

“He must have known he was forgiven *then*—his long penitence accepted—his trial ended! His sufferings must have been to him a pledge of pardon.”

In general Ginevra was not perfectly at home in English; but when the subject incited her, she was eloquent in a manner peculiar to herself. Her language was picturesque, and she spoke as others write, but with a simplicity that took away from her *conversation* all appearance of effort or affectation. There was something in the tone of her observations which harmonised with the secret impressions of Walter's hidden life—that life of the soul which holds its deep and silent course apart from all outward converse with the world, or even from the most intimate associations of our

homes and hearts. The writings of past generations, the solitary studies of years, his instinctive yearnings after a deeper faith and a wider sympathy than his own religious education or his own times afforded, had prepared him to feel for the young Italian, and he was listening to her original thoughts clothed in eloquent and expressive language, with an interest mingled with curiosity, when he perceived that she suddenly checked herself, and turning round, he saw Edmund Neville enter the room, and approach the table where they were sitting. He took up one of the illuminated sketches, and carelessly inquired if that was the design for his chapel.

"It is the one I had fixed upon," replied Walter. "Are you going to Darrell-court to-morrow?"

"I believe Miss Leslie has arranged it. Has the Signora Ginevra made up her mind to accompany us?" he added in a low voice, as he rapidly turned over the leaves of a book he had seized hold of.

"Why should not you go?" said Walter, seeing that she made no answer to Neville.

"Because I have not strength for it," she replied slowly, as if it cost her an effort to speak.

"Are you ill?" he exclaimed; "I am sure you are ill. Shall I get you some water?"

She nodded assent, and he rushed to the door, almost knocking down two tables on his way. When he returned a few minutes afterwards, with a glass of water in his hand, he found Ginevra alone; she was standing by the table, and he thought she trembled as she extended her hand to take the glass; she raised it to her lips and tried to drink, but not succeeding, put it down, turned to walk away, and then sat down as if unable to cross the room.

"I shall call your sister," said Walter.

She shook her head, laid her hand on his arm to detain him, gasped for breath, and then burst into an agony of tears. Walter took her hand, and said in a serious manner—

"Ginevra Leslie, you are very unhappy. How shall you bear to live among strangers, and never to open your heart to any one?"

She made a strong effort, subdued the nervous agitation that had overcome her, and answered calmly—

"I have given way before you. Do not take advantage of my weakness. Do not tell my father and my sister of this uncontrollable emotion. It was sudden, but you see it is short."

"But there is a *cause*," said Walter, "and a deep one."

"O, have we not all of us," she exclaimed, "a well-spring of suffering in our hearts which we keep down with a strong hand, and which we master with a strong will?"

"Do not trust too much to your strength," said Walter, as he saw the paleness which again spread over her face.

"I would not," she said earnestly—"I would not if it were my own strength, but God gives it, and He will not withdraw it, though sometimes my own heart rises against me with such violence that I quail before it."

"I have seen you for a few days, and scarcely knew you an hour ago, but I would fain serve you. May I?—can I?"

"Mr. Sydney," said Ginevra, and she took both his hands in hers, "you have been very kind to me to-day; and I do not regret," she stopped a moment and then went on—"I do not regret that you have seen me thus agitated—thus disturbed—you will not think hardly of me—I know you will not."

Her voice faltered, and Walter interrupted her.

"It is so natural that you should feel depressed—you are so very young. Everything here must appear strange to you; and you have had afflictions," he added still more gently, and glancing at her black dress; "and some of those you love, though not taken from you by death, are far away, and you would fain see them again—you would fain see your own home and speak your own tongue again."

She raised her pale but most expressive eyes to his face, and said, slowly—

"There is one at whose feet I should wish to kneel, once again, before I die; but he is not where my home was. It is my mother's uncle," she continued, as Walter looked at her inquiringly, "Father Francesco; he left Verona a year ago for a distant mission; he grieved to leave me, but his duty called him, and he went—for how long I know not. On earth I may never see him again—and yet I think I shall—not now, not soon—but once more in my life. It is when the agony deepens, and the shades darken, that angels are sent to us. Perhaps," she continued, with increasing emotion, "perhaps he will come to me when my strength is failing, and evil is waxing strong, and hope is forsaking me—perhaps God will send him to say to me, 'O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?'"

She hid her face in her hands and remained silent. Walter

looked at her with inexpressible interest, but scarcely knew what to say. She seemed very unhappy; perhaps the excess of her grief was childish; at least, she could have no reason for gloomy forebodings, and he tried to say so. She listened to him for some minutes without altering her position, and while he spoke of her father's love, of her sister's joy at finding her so charming and so kind, Walter grew quite eloquent. In a few moments she raised her head and smiled sweetly. The last words she uttered had brought with them the strength she needed. She had ceased to doubt. Her brow was calm and her eye was bright. Whatever was the spirit that had moved her soul erewhile, one mightier still had now gained the mastery. Whatever billows were gathering about her, she was treading them again with a firm step, and measuring them with an unshrinking eye. She rose, held out her hand to Walter, and glancing once more at the engraving which he had shown her, she said in a low voice—

“Pray for me, that my faith may never fail me.”

The following morning Margaret woke early with her mind full of excitement at the thoughts of the projected expedition, and from her muslin-curtained bed watched with impatience the unclosing of the shutters; it was snowing heavily, and she turned towards the wall with a feeling of keen disappointment. She called to her maid, in a sleepy voice—

“Grace, have you been to my sister's room yet?”

“Yes, Miss; half an hour ago. Miss Ginevra was up and dressed.”

“So early,” cried Margaret, with a prolonged yawn.

“Those foreigners have such queer habits,” Grace observed.

“They never can do things like other people. Who ever heard of a young lady not having a maid, and dressing herself? But then, to be sure, I have heard it said that Miss Ginevra was brought up in a mean sort of way, and that her mother was not a real lady, not even in her own country.”

Margaret felt provoked at this speech, but did not exactly know how to show her displeasure. While Grace was doing her hair, she returned to the same subject.

“Mrs. Warren's maid says that Miss Ginevra does nothing like the rest of the world, and she does not set much store by such people,—Mrs. Henderson does not. She says, they never come to much good in the end.”

“What nonsense you are talking, Grace! Of course my sister

does not dress or talk exactly as we do, because she was brought up differently. It would be very odd if she was like us in everything."

"So indeed it would, Miss, and being a Papist, too, poor thing. Mrs. Henderson says, they never slept anywhere on the road but Miss Ginevra was off to church before breakfast; but all that church-going, as Mrs. Henderson says, does not come to good at last."

"What do you or Mrs. Henderson know about it? I dare say we should all be the better for going oftener to church. Mr. Sydney thinks so, and walks a great way off every day for daily service."

"O but your grandpapa's butler says, Miss, that Mr. Walter is a Papist in disguise; and Mrs. Henderson would not be at all surprised if Miss Ginevra was to talk him over into being one in good earnest. John said they was looking at them Papish books in the library last night, and they was shaking hands over them, and Miss Ginevra was crying when he went in to put coals on."

"Shaking hands and crying? What are you talking about?" exclaimed Margaret impatiently; but at the same moment she remembered that, when going to bed the night before, she had remarked traces of tears on her sister's face; and she felt annoyed at the idea that something had passed between her and Walter with which she had not been made acquainted. "She treats me as a child," was her next feeling; "she kisses me, puts flowers in my hair, calls me her Reine Marguerite; but, now that I think about it, not one word has she said to me of her thoughts, of her feelings, of her past life—of herself, in short. And now, it seems, that Walter and she have been talking together in the most confidential manner—have been forming a secret friendship. I really have borne a great deal. I did not mind Mrs. Warren's saying rather rudely before me, how much papa admired her the most,—her dress, at least,—which comes to the same; and I told her she was the favourite, and that I did not mind it—and I do not mind it; but if Walter and she are to have long *tête-à-têtes*, and I am to be neglected by everybody—"

Grace, who had been too busily engaged with some of her professional duties to speak during the last few minutes, now began again—

"Mrs. Henderson can't think how her lady came to allow Miss Ginevra to walk out by herself, as she did, abroad, and not to wear a bonnet on, too. She says it gave her quite a turn the first day she saw her in the street, dressed in that queer fashion. It's so very unbecoming and bold like."

"Not when it is the custom," said Margaret, impatiently.

"Oh no, to be sure, Miss, it is all custom; and many foreign customs we shall have to put up with here, no doubt; perhaps we may all have to walk out without our bonnets soon, for they say the Colonel is so partial to miss Ginevra, that she will have everything her own way before long."

Margaret's cheek was very much flushed at that moment; whether it was that she was stooping over the fire lacing a very tight boot, or that her pride was stung to the quick at finding that her father's preference for her sister was noticed and commented upon even by the household. In a voice that betrayed irritation, she replied—

"I really must request, Grace, that you do not make remarks of that sort in future. They are unbecoming in you, and very disagreeable to me."

Grace, who was about the same age as her mistress, and nearly as much spoiled, had no notion of being snubbed in this manner, and began to justify herself in a tone of mingled anger and plain-tiveness.

"Indeed, Miss, as to making any disagreeable remarks, it is the last thing I ever think of doing; but I am much attached to you, and I have been many years in the family, and I cannot bear to think of your being put upon or cut out in any way; and when I heard it said you would be put on the shelf, and your youngest sister, a foreigner and a Papist, too, be set up above us all, it went hard with me."

"You really forget yourself, Grace," interrupted Margaret, indignantly. "I cannot suffer such things to be said to me."

"Very well, Miss; very well;" murmured Grace, with a look of much resignation. "I will not say another word; no, not if the grass was to be cut from under your feet, or the very bed taken from under you; no, not if Miss Ginevra was to set her cap at Mr. Neville, which she is very likely to do—for Mrs. Henderson says there never was a gentleman yet she did not make fall in love with her; and she was walking home with him yesterday: when they passed before the woodman's cottage, and when they came near to the park gate, she turned one way, and he another; but I don't care; it does not signify. I won't say another word, though she were to be married before you, and you had to be her brides-maid."

At this climax Grace burst into tears, and Margaret desired her to leave the room.

Her pensive and troubled countenance as she leant against the chimney after dismissing her maid, showed the restless workings of her mind. She brooded over her words, and called to mind divers trifling circumstances which had occurred during the last few days, with an anxious desire to define or to dissipate the vague suspicions which were crowding into her troubled imagination. Her thoughts ran to and fro, as she rapidly paced her little room, and now and then resumed her previous attitude. "Was it, indeed," she thought, "a true presentiment that cast such a dark shade over the days that preceded Ginevra's arrival? Has she come with her strange beauty, with her smooth tongue, with the magic of her genius and her resistless captivation, to steal away from me the heart of Edmund Neville? Was it to him that she addressed, on the night of his arrival, that strain of impassioned harmony which seemed to draw him to her side, and to fill his soul with indescribable emotion? She met him yesterday, and spent in his society the very hours in which I wandered alone in silent disappointment; and afterwards she spoke honied words to me, and crowned me with flowers, and affectedly disclaimed my praises. But then what will follow? What will happen? What can I do? How can I compete with her? I cannot smile, or sing, or talk, like Ginevra; I cannot look like an angel and act all the time a cruel and deceitful part. Is it not hard that she should snatch away from me my cup of hope and of happiness, and wring my heart with anguish, which I must bear in secret! for none must know—(here the poor child's grief found vent in tears)—none must know how I have loved him, how I love him every day more devotedly; but they will know—they have seen—how Walter will pity me!—(now a burning blush covered her cheeks); and grandpapa, who was saying yesterday—but it is impossible; I think I must be dreaming or mad to suppose it. He has but just seen her; he scarcely knows her. Three short days cannot have changed him, and destroyed all my happiness. Her heart is calm and free; mine is throbbing as if it would break from my breast. Shall I tell her that I love him? O no, I am afraid of her. I cannot upbraid her, and I dare not ask her to have mercy; and yet perhaps she would. Can it be that Edmund has confided to her that he loves me? and that they met to speak of it yesterday?"

Like a flash of summer lightning on a cloudy sky, that last idea crossed the gloomy forebodings of the anxious girl, and a train of joyful anticipation followed in its track. The more she dwelt upon

it, the more probable it appeared. Guileless as a child, and open as the day, she could with difficulty attribute evil motives to others; and in the warmth of her own affection, she reckoned on theirs, and was now ready to fly to her sister's feet, confess her suspicions, and implore her forgiveness for having in her secret thoughts unjustly accused her. Under this impression her manner to Ginevra was still more affectionate than usual, and she endeavoured to find her alone, and to enter into conversation with her; but this was more difficult than it appeared, and without refusing to sit with her, or to talk to her, it so happened that her sister was almost always engaged in some other manner when she proposed it, and seldom left the drawing-room, where the continued snow kept most of the party prisoners. Edmund Neville proposed one morning to read out loud, and the offer was joyfully accepted by Margaret.

"Shall it be in English or in Italian?" he inquired, glancing at Ginevra, who smiled and said—

"You will make too many mistakes."

"O no," he replied, "I am a tolerable Italian scholar, and your sister wishes, I know, to hear the '*Promessi Sposi*.' Don't you, Margaret?"

She said "Yes" rather coldly, for he had opened the book, and changing his place beside her for one on the sofa where Ginevra was sitting, he turned to her with that peculiar expression which now and then gave softness to his piercing eyes, and said,

"Stop me when I make some great fault, but do not be *too severe*."

She gently shook her head, lifted for an instant her dark eye-lashes, and bent upon him a glance of such indescribable tenderness, that Margaret felt her hopes die away, and her fears return with renewed bitterness. During the two hours that followed, the sisters seemed for a while to have exchanged positions and characters. Margaret sat listening to the voice of the man she loved. But, melodious as it was, in her ears the sweetness of its tone had vanished. Silent and gloomy, but rivetted to the spot as by some spell, she heard him read the beautiful opening description of Manzoni's incomparable novel; and when she laughed at the inimitable account of Don Abbondio's meeting with the bravoos, there was a nervous expression in her face, and a painful quivering about her mouth. On the other hand, it seemed as if the reserve and the composure of Ginevra's usual manner had given way for a while to an animated interest—to a sympathetic excitement. Her eyes,

usually fixed on her work even when conversing with others, were now raised sometimes to Neville's face, sometimes on the broad snowy landscape without; her hands, usually so busily employed, were now resting, one on the back of the couch, and the other on her breast, while she clasped the velvet ribbon that bound her neck. She seemed to breathe more freely than usual, to laugh more carelessly, to have given her spirit a holiday. Sometimes she took the book from Neville, and read a few sentences herself, or, leaning over his shoulder, she imitated the Milanese accent while pronouncing Agnese's enchanting *naïvetés*, or Renzo's charming rusticities; and once, as she was uttering with admirable grace and feeling the following words: "Ma il pensiero di Lucia quanti pensieri traeva seco! Tante speranze! Tante promesse! Un avvenire così vagheggiato, così tenuto sicuro! e quel giorno così sospirato!" he turned his face towards her—their eyes met, her fair hair almost touched his dark locks,—and even when she had ceased to speak he seemed still to listen, and she to repeat in the silent language of her eyes, what her lips had just uttered. Turn by turn they read, and Margaret watched; each moment seemed an age—each moment she was on the point of starting up indignantly—of leaving them abruptly. They seemed to forget her presence, almost her existence; she ceased to attend, or to follow the sense of the words. Her thoughts were no longer with Manzoni's creations; they had reverted to that wild and unfinished poem, that strange Christabel, which had already haunted her mind and disturbed her imagination. She felt as if a spell was upon her—as if she, too, had seen in that hour what no one else had seen, what no one else would ever believe, what she dared not describe, what she scarcely comprehended; but this she felt, that her hopes, her joy, her happiness, were conjured away from her grasp in some irresistible manner; they were escaping from her hold, they were dying away; and to all but herself it seemed the simplest thing in the world that it should be so—no one would resent it, or even observe it. Those lips would continue to utter their "dulcet and harmonious sounds;" those eyes would speak or feign a love more ardent and bewitching than her own dared to reveal; that pale cheek would bloom in his presence, and every glance and every gesture tell a tale of passion; while her own childish glee, her own trembling hopes, would wither in the shade like a rose plucked from its stem before the sun has shone upon it, or the morning of life passed away. The scene was sadly changed; the Spirit of mistrust had breathed as he passed

on every flower in her path. Like a garden which, on the day of the year's first frost, shows black and shrivelled leaves, where a few hours before bloomed an earthly paradise, so the sweet affections and the kindly sympathies that swayed poor Margaret's heart ere-while were blighted, drooping, perhaps expiring. For the first time in her life she maintained a gloomy silence, while Jealousy and Hatred, those terrific visitors of the soul, hovered in the distance, in dim and shadowy forms, and whispered in her trembling ears their first dark suggestions—their first foul suspicions. And this lasted—this silent drama unfolded itself—this deepening mystery ran its course—till at the end of about two hours the doors were thrown open, and Lady Donnington and Miss Vincent were announced.

CHAPTER X.

Margaret started from her chair, and rushed to meet her visitors. She scarcely knew whether their arrival gave her pain or pleasure; but she was glad of anything that changed for the moment a state of feeling that was becoming too acutely painful. Maud kissed her affectionately, and then her eyes wandered in search of Ginevra, who was at that moment advancing towards them. She coldly offered her hand to her, and Margaret perceived with astonishment that a crimson blush had covered her sister's face, and that she seemed to shrink from the piercing glance that Maud turned upon her. Her embarrassment was so visible, that Margaret felt its influence, and also coloured. Maud seemed to enjoy the evident confusion which her presence occasioned, and said a few words about renewing her acquaintance with Miss Leslie, and the manner in which it brought back to her mind their meetings at Genoa. Lady Donnington was so engaged at first in inquiries after every member of Edmund Neville's family, (for she was civil, as other people are literary, or professional or scientific—it was the business—the enjoyment—the sum total of her existence,) that she had no time to bestow on Ginevra; but in the midst of her concern for a second cousin of Mrs. Warren's, who had had the scarlatina, she suddenly recollected her Italian acquaintance, and shook hands with her repeatedly; but at the same time, with a sort of deprecating sigh, and smothered ejaculation, which seemed to apologise at once for not having seen her before, and for being glad to see her then.

A few words of general conversation passed, and then luncheon was announced, and the whole party moved to the dining-room. Maud watched, like a lynx, every turn of Margaret's countenance, and soon perceived that she was ill at ease, and that her efforts at conversation were not successful. She directed her glances alternately on her, on Ginevra, and on Edmund; and an expression of awakened interest, like that of a dog who has just caught the scent, seemed to sharpen her features and brighten her eyes. As soon as

she could escape from the dining-room, she seized Margaret's arm, and led her gently, but forcibly, across the drawing-room into the library, and then into the corner of the remotest couch. When she had fixed her there, she said in a low, impressive, and inquiring tone—

“Well?”

“Well, I am very glad to see you, Maud; I was afraid the weather was so bad you would not come.”

“Are you going to talk to me of the weather?” Maud answered in a tone that was half playful and half impatient; “have you nothing more interesting to tell me?”

“What?—what do you mean?”

“Are you not about to inform me that of all the captivating creatures in the world, your sister is the most irresistible. I am quite prepared for it, I assure you. I hear you are all mad about her; that your father says she is an angel; that Mr. Sydney calls her a saint; and that we shall not have a chance any of us of being even looked at, much less thought of, by anybody, as long as the fair Ginevra remains among us.”

“She is very charming,” Margaret answered; and there was such a sad tone in her voice as she pronounced the word, that Maud ventured to say, in a manner that might have passed for a mere joke and innocent inquiry,

“Then you have had nothing as yet but the *patte de velours*? You are quite *sous le charme*, I suppose?”

Margaret, like all frank people, detested a hint; and being, moreover, predisposed at that moment to irritation, exclaimed warmly—

“Why really, Maud, I wish you would speak out, or not speak at all. What is the use of beating about the bush, and putting unpleasant ideas into my head, for the sole purpose of plaguing me? As they tell people in the marriage-service, do say what you have to say at once, or ‘for ever hold your peace.’”

“O, you have been studying that part of the prayer-book lately? Are you perfect in the responses, and prepared to say, ‘I, Margaret, take thee, Edmund—’”

“Far from it,” exclaimed Margaret, with impetuosity; “there is no question of my marrying Mr. Neville.”

“The question may not yet have been asked, but it does not follow that it will not,” said Maud, “unless——”

"Unless what?" cried Margaret, whose interest in the subject got the better at once of her caution and of her irritation.

"Unless," said Maud, "the game should be taken out of your hands, my dear unsuspecting, confiding Margaret and your *young* and *artless* sister should employ her talents and her charms in that direction. Do not turn away from me, do not look so angry with me. Now, Margaret, do be reasonable. What possible interest can I have in putting you on your guard, except that of saving you from the wretched position of a dupe? I know more of the world than you do, and I also know more, I am sorry to say it, of the character and of the artifices of a coquette, and of the unrelenting manner in which a woman of that description will pursue her object, and gain her end."

"Ginevra cannot be a coquette," Margaret answered, in a hesitating manner. "She is so good, so affectionate, so modest,—at least, I think—I hope so."

"You do not feel sure of it, Margaret—you, who have seen nothing to the contrary; but watch her—remember my advice—*watch her*. I could tell you much on this subject, but I prefer leaving you to your own observations."

"You know more of foreigners than I do, Maud," said Margaret thoughtfully; "I suppose their manners and ways are always very different from ours."

"In what respect? Cannot you give me an instance of what you mean?"

"I mean that what would not be modest or becoming in an English girl, might, from different habits and customs, be quite natural and proper in a foreigner."

"Why, in married women that might be the case, perhaps; but young ladies abroad are particularly demure, and silent, and proper, and all that sort of thing."

"Well, so she is in some ways, but——"

"But she would not mind walking alone with a gentleman, or writing to him in secret, or——"

As Maud said these words, she carefully watched her companion's countenance, and almost started herself at Margaret's sudden exclamation,

"O Maud! how did you know—how did you guess?"

A look of amused exultation danced in her eyes; and she, in her turn, exclaimed—

"What! I *have* guessed, have I? *You* have had a specimen of

your sister's way of going on! and you have been keeping it to yourself all this time, and only sighing deeply over her many attractions. She has corrupted you already, Margaret, for you would never have been so hypocritical six months ago?"

Margaret coloured deeply at this taunt, and answered with some warmth—

"It is not fair, Maud, to take the words out of my mouth—to cross-question me in this way, and then accuse me of hypocrisy, because I am unwilling to think ill of my sister, or to say what may prejudice others against her."

"O, as to that, my dear child, you need have no scruples; what you can tell me, will only be the simple sequel of what, with my own eyes, I have seen."

"What *do* you mean, Maud? Oh, pray speak out at last, and let me know the worst. You have said too much now to draw back, and you must tell me all you know."

"Well," returned Maud, drawing her lips together, and playing with the trinkets of her chatelaine, "I suppose I am now absolved from my foolish promise to Lucy, not to set you against your sister till you had yourself seen reason to conceive doubts or suspicions about her."

"Oh! I never said I had, Maud. Heaven forbid it; that would be too dreadful!"

"Then what is it you *did* say?" retorted Maud, impatiently; "do not let us go on for ever beating about the bush. What have you seen or heard of your sister that made you ask me that question about foreigners just now, and then, when I spoke of walking alone with a gentleman, made you exclaim, 'O, Maud, how did you know?' Margaret, you had better at once tell me the truth, or I shall suspect something worse, perhaps."

"O no! you must not, indeed; and, perhaps, it was all accidental, and my foolish fancy; but, as you say, I had better tell you the simple truth; but I am very sorry now I ever alluded to it at all. She walked home from chapel last Sunday alone with Mr. Neville, and never said anything to me about it."

"And you are jealous?" said Maud, with a provoking smile.

Margaret coloured, and replied, in a tone of irritation—

"I dislike the appearance of a mystery—that is all; and Ginevra's manner is so unequal, sometimes so very retired, and at other times not quite exactly what—what I like; I may remark that, without being jealous, as you call it."

"Oh, certainly; and I am glad to hear that you are *not* jealous, for I have not a doubt that your sister has quite made up her mind to captivate Mr. Neville; and with all your beauty and your attractions, you have not a chance with such a thorough-paced coquette as this charming Ginevra. There is only one way of counteracting her devices;—perhaps, if Mr. Neville's eyes were opened to her real character, contempt might guard him against her attractions."

"Contempt!" repeated Margaret; "it would not be easy to despise Ginevra. Oh, Maud, even while I say there is something about her which puzzles me, and causes a sort of vague suspicion to dart through my mind, I am angry with myself for having felt it, and still more for having owned it; perhaps she is an angel of goodness, and I—oh I sometimes think myself too wicked for having had such thoughts."

Poor Margaret looked very unhappy, and it was with a real feeling of interest that Maud Vincent took her hand, and looked into her face as she replied,

"My dear girl, do not add to your distress by unnecessary self-reproaches. You have only vaguely discerned in your sister's manner and conduct what *must* be repugnant to your own sense of right, and what *I* have known long ago was the case. I have had the most unequivocal evidence of the extraordinary contrasts between her apparent reserve and her real character."

Margaret started, and looked anxiously at her companion.

"You know already," continued Maud, "that we were at Genoa at the same time she was, and that we saw a great deal of her. I never liked her from the first; there was something so cold and uncertain in her manner, and she never seemed at her ease with me; but Lucy took one of her violent *engouements* for her, and I never heard anything from morning to night but praises of Ginevra Leslie, and exclamations about her beauty, her goodness, and her talents. They used to read together, and walk together, and Lucy, who had always had rather a fancy for Catholicism, was quite taken up with her new friend, and went with her to convents, and hospitals, and churches, and found out, *accidentally*, all sorts of beautiful traits of charity and self-denial which this wonderful model of perfection practised in secret. I hid my diminished head, and began to feel rather ashamed of my prejudice against her; when, alas! for Lucy and her idol, I too made a discovery of secret doings of a very different character. One morning that Frederic and I had

walked out before breakfast, we passed before the church of the Capuchins, and, attracted by the music, we went in, and standing near a column, watched the service for a few minutes. Among the poorer people who were kneeling before the altar, was your sister; and certainly, I never saw any one *appear* more devout than she did. She seemed to pray with her whole heart and soul, and while the beads glided through her fingers, her eyes were fixed with an intensity of supplication I never saw in any eyes before, on the crucifix over the altar. I could not take my eyes off her, and I observed her do a very kind thing during that service. There was a little girl kneeling by her on the cold marble, (for there were neither chairs nor benches within reach), who looked very ill and weak, and leaned against her for support; I felt touched, I own, when I saw your sister, instead of shrinking from the dirty little creature, take her in her arms, and hold her there during the rest of the mass, while she remained kneeling herself, and her attitude was so beautiful, that I was not surprised when Frederic touched my arm, and pointed to her and then to a picture of the Virgin and Child, which hung near us, and whispered, 'How like!' As we came out, Frederic said to me, 'Do let us ask Miss Leslie to breakfast with us; it will please Lucy so much.' I made no objection, and we accordingly went up to her as she was coming down the steps, and proposed that she should return home with us. She thanked me, but declined with that gentle manner, and that peculiar smile which you know so well, and which is always to me so suspicious; I cannot bear people who *never* look cross or angry. Well, Fred. persisted in pressing her to come, and she still refused, without assigning any reason. At last, she said something about being expected at home, and looked quite uncomfortable when Fred. (with, I own, not exquisite tact) kept on urging the point. At last, she wished us good-bye in a decisive manner, and left us. Well, instead of going straight home, as we had intended to do, we extended our walk towards the Acqua Sola. It so happened, that when we reached the Villa Negri I missed my bracelet, and supposing that I must have dropped it either in or just outside the church, we turned back, and retraced our steps. As we passed through one of the trellised alleys of the Acqua Sola, who should I see through the vine branches which separated us from the little fountain gardens on our left, but Ginevra, seated on a bench, not very far from us, in earnest conversation with a man whose back was turned to me. Frederic wanted to hurry on, but I confess to you that curiosity, and a feeling stronger

than curiosity, rooted me to the spot. I had been persuaded all along that that extraordinary perfection which was lauded before me from morning to night, was not quite so consistent as my family wished to make out, and I was not sorry that Frederic, who had always joined with Lucy in exclaiming against my ill-nature whenever I had given a hint of the sort, should have ocular demonstration that the reserve and modesty they had so much extolled was not *always* at least, the order of the day. My dear Margaret, I hardly like to distress you by telling you the whole truth, but as I have said so much, I had better keep nothing from you ; and after all, anything is better than to be deceived. Not only did I see Ginevra look up into her companion's face with an expression of countenance that left no doubt as to the nature of their conversation, but I also saw that her hand was clasped in his, and he frequently pressed it to his lips ; and that before they parted, which they did an instant afterwards, with some precipitation, he put his arm round her waist and kissed her repeatedly. He darted away in one direction, with his hat slouched over his face, so that I could not discern his features. She remained an instant apparently absorbed in thought, and then starting up from her seat, walked rapidly towards the steps of the Acqua Sola. At the end of the alley she came in sight of us. She turned as pale as death, and hurried on without speaking or looking towards us. Since that day we heard several things about her which served to confirm the impression which this incident had produced upon us. She was known to carry on a secret correspondence, and to have resorted to various expedients for concealing the letters she received, and those she sent, from Mrs. Warren's observation. There were some very bad stories about her, but as I cannot vouch for their truth, I will not pain you by repeating them ; mamma begged us to avoid as much as possible any intimacy with her, and a short time afterwards we left Genoa."

Margaret, who had listened to this long account without speaking, and with a contracted brow and flushed cheek, suggested, that although what Maud had *accidentally* seen (she laid a slightly ironical stress on the word) was shocking and painful in the extreme, still, she felt inclined to hope that her sister was attached to an Italian, and one perhaps whom she might have known from childhood ; and that, in that case, however blameable her conduct might have been in carrying on a clandestine intercourse, it would, perhaps, admit of some excuse. Maud looked very incredulous,

and adverted to some circumstances which militated, in her opinion, against this charitable supposition, and ended by saying,

"Well, my dear Margaret, if you have seen nothing in your sister's manners and conduct which you dislike or disapprove, 'Mettez que je n'ai rien dit,' as French people say. I do not wish to force you to concur in my unalterable opinion on the subject; of course, if Ginevra is attached to an Italian lover, there can be no fear of her endeavouring to gain the affections of any one else."

"But," exclaimed Margaret with impatience, (for she felt the full force of Maud's insinuations), "but can she really be a miserable hypocrite? Does she feign to serve God, to love goodness, to honour virtue? Is there no reality in her faith, in her piety, in her affections? O, Maud, she cannot be so disgustingly wicked!"

"My dear child, it does not follow because your sister is a coquette, and, as I sometimes think, more than a coquette, that she absolutely feigns the sentiments she seems at times to possess. I dare say she has a sort of half scenic, half romantic religion, which is very common among Catholics, and which has nothing to do with morality, and I have no doubt that she is very good to the poor, and all that sort of thing; but her religion teaches that you can make up for every kind of sin by good works of an easy description, and that if you confess and get absolution, you may feel quite satisfied, and go on just as before; so you see that Catholics can be very religious and very immoral at the same time, without being exactly hypocrites."

"I see," said Margaret, thoughtfully; "that accounts for it all."

The oft-repeated slander had been uttered; the falsehood which the lives of a thousand saints have disproved,—which the voice of the preacher, the pen of the learned, the experience of millions, and miracles of grace, and prodigies of penitence, daily contradict,—had been brought to bear, and Margaret, sighing deeply, carried away with her, as that conversation ended, an unfavourable impression of her sister's character, and a most mistaken view of that sister's faith.

In the mean time Ginevra had been conversing too. Lady Downington had gone up to Mrs. Thornton's room, and the rest of the company had left the drawing-room, with the exception of Mr. Warren, who was looking listlessly out of a window, near which Ginevra was working. A noise of horse's feet on the road below the terrace made her raise her eyes, and she saw Edmund Neville on horseback, galloping very fast, but curbing with a strong hand the

fiery and foaming horse that was bounding under him. As he shot like an arrow past the window, Mr. Warren exclaimed—

“There he goes. Reckless and headstrong as ever! Ah, Signora, your pretty little sister will have much ado to keep her captive in order, even if she succeeds in bringing him to her feet.”

“Are you in earnest?” said his companion, suddenly turning towards him and looking him full in the face.

“I am—but I do not think *he* is, though he certainly said something like it yesterday.”

“It is impossible,” said Ginevra, and there was a tremulous movement in her hands, as she rapidly passed her needle through the canvas.

“It is very undesirable he should marry so young,” continued Mr. Warren, “but by no means impossible that he is thinking of it. My agent told me that it was reported all over the county that he is about to marry your sister. I don’t believe it myself, but they say he will behave very ill to her if he does not, and between ourselves, Signorina, I must say that she looks head over ears in love with him already.”

“No, no,” exclaimed his companion in a hurried manner. “No, you must be wrong. It cannot be; but—but, you should speak to your nephew; you should tell him what people say. You will not let this go on; you can save much misery by speaking to him at once.”

“Oh; so I suppose Miss Margaret Leslie has confided to you her inclination for my too captivating nephew.”

“You are quite mistaken,” replied Ginevra coldly, but in an instant returning to the charge, she added, “you promise, don’t you, to speak to—your nephew?”

“But perhaps he really does mean to marry your sister, and if so, would it not be a pity to interfere and spoil such a match?”

Ginevra was silent, and Mr. Warren continued,—

“My nephew would do well to marry an heiress, for rich as he will be, his means will never equal his extravagance. I happen to know that he is deeply involved in debt already.”

“Has he not a kind father?” asked Ginevra, without raising her eyes.

“Kind enough when he is not thwarted, but intractable in some cases; full of crotchets, and prejudiced to excess. He had a great antipathy to me at one time, but I won his heart when I was last in England by attending the meetings at Exeter Hall.”

"What is Exeter Hall?" asked Ginevra, who had heard of Exeter 'Change, and supposed one of Mr. Neville's peculiarities might be a taste for wild beasts.

"A place, my fair signora, where we thank God that we are not as other men are—that is, deluded papists like yourself. Do not be angry—you know well I am no fierce Protestant like my brother-in-law, but it was necessary to convince him that I had not fallen a prey to Popery, the phantom that haunts him by day and by night. By the way, you will be a sad obstacle to Edmund's marriage with your sister. A Catholic sister-in-law! the very idea will make his hair stand on end!"

Mr. Warren sauntered out of the room, humming an opera air, and when the door closed behind him Ginevra's needle fell from her hands; her eye rested on the open book which Edmund had left on the table, then on her own hand. A few tears rolled slowly down her face; she wiped them hastily away, and began to work again, while her brow contracted with an expression of deep and painful thought. She was roused by the sound of wheels, and glancing at the window, saw Lady Donnington's carriage drive away. She passed her hand once across her brow, drew a deep breath, and then perceived Margaret and Maud, who had entered the room together, and were advancing towards her. She gave a slight start, but quickly recovering herself, spoke to them in her usual gentle manner, and asked after Lucy.

"You will see her to-morrow," Maud answered; "she will come with my father and mother, and we all remain till Saturday."

"I am so glad of that," exclaimed Mrs. Warren, who had followed them into the room, "and especially that I find you mean to be very gay this week, Miss Leslie."

"O yes," replied Margaret, in an absent and dejected tone; "so very gay."

"On Thursday there is to be a ball," said Maud, "and Friday we shall act charades. Who do you expect to-morrow, Margaret, besides my people?"

"Sir Charles D'Arcy, and my uncle, John Thornton."

"You must display all your talents on the occasion, signora," said Mrs. Warren, turning to Ginevra; "you must sing and act, and compose."

"O, of course," interrupted Maud; "you will be the prima donna, and act to perfection. I wonder what part would suit you best?"

Ginevra's lip was quivering, and her head was bent over her frame to hide the workings of her countenance.

"We ought to have a scene from 'She Stoops to Conquer,'" Maud continued, "or, to aspire still higher, from 'All's Well that ends Well.' The very name of that play is a moral."

Walter, who had taken up a book and sat down by the table, raised his eyes, and looked with surprise at the group before him. Ginevra was silent, and seemed unable to smile or to speak. Maud was standing before the fire and watching her, with an expression of half amused and half spiteful interest, and Margaret, his darling Margaret, with swollen eyes, a curling lip, and contracted brow, leaned against the chimney, and looked from one to the other in a quick and restless manner. Mrs. Warren seemed chiefly engrossed in ransacking her memory for charades, and now and then announced that she had found the very word they wanted, but it was generally rejected as old, imperfect, or impossible to be got up. This went on for a while, and then Ginevra folded her work, drew her shawl round her shoulders, and glided out of the room. Maud followed her with her eyes, and then whispered to Margaret—

"I am perfectly certain that she will contrive to see Mr. Neville before dressing time; I would bet anything that she does. Do you ever go to her room before dinner?"

"At six o'clock she likes to arrange my hair, and I always go to her then."

"If you were to go at five, you would not find her."

"No, she is almost always with my father at that hour."

Maud looked disappointed, and for some time the silence was unbroken, except by the rustling of Walter's newspaper, and Mrs. Warren's murmured cogitations.

"'Rose-Mary'—no, that's too old; 'Bull-Finch'—can't be acted; 'Ivan-hoe'—'hoe'—what could be done for 'hoe?' Mr. Warren, how could we act 'hoe?'"

This question was addressed to her husband, who had just come in, and was warming himself, with his back to the fire.

"Oh, very easily, I dare say. Just read that."

He tossed a letter into her lap, which she took up negligently, but after reading the first lines, her whole attention seemed riveted, and she looked up two or three times into his face with an anxious and inquiring expression. At that moment the door was opened, and Colonel Leslie asked,

"Is Ginevra here?"

"No," cried Walter.

"She is out," said Mr. Warren; "I met her just now on the West Terrace."

Maud looked at Margaret, who remained in gloomy silence, with her eyes fixed on the fire. She drew near to her and whispered, "Can't you tell Mr. Sydney to look for her?"

Anything of a plot or a contrivance was so foreign to Margaret's nature, that she shook her head, and said nothing, and a moment afterwards, disgusted with Ginevra, with Maud, and with herself, she slowly crossed the room to leave it. Walter opened the door for her, and whispered, "Margaret, what is the matter with you; are you ill or unhappy?"

"Both," she exclaimed, and snatching away her hand which he had taken, she rushed to her own room, bolted the door, and cried bitterly.

- At six o'clock a restless feeling of anxiety and curiosity would not suffer her to omit her usual visit to Ginevra; when she entered her room, her bonnet and cloak were lying on a chair near the door; she hastily touched them as she passed, and their heavy dampness proved that they had been only just taken off. Flowers were lying as usual on the table; she took her accustomed place, and Ginevra began plaiting her hair. Neither of them spoke, but once Margaret started as a hot tear fell on her brow. It was silently kissed away, and strange to say, in that moment she felt no anger or resentment, only a deep oppressive sense of misery. She hid her face in her hands, and her tears flowed in silence. Ginevra knelt by her side, and threw her arms round her. Grace opened the door, and both sisters started like frightened fawns; without a word or a glance, Margaret rushed out of the room, and while she finished her dressing, tried to collect her thoughts. She felt as if there were two different Margarets within her, and two Ginevras near her. The one who listened to Maud, and suspected her sister, and the one who had wept with that sister just now; and the Ginevra that Maud described, and that she dreaded and disliked, could it be that gentle girl whose tears had fallen on her brow, and whose lips had been so softly pressed on her cheek?

The dinner-bell rang before she had finished dressing, and as she was hurrying down stairs, she passed Edmund Neville and Mr. Warren, who were speaking eagerly to each other, without noticing her approach. The latter was talking very fast, and she

only distinguished these words: "It had occurred to me before, and all I can say is, that you may reckon upon me, and the sooner you go the better." Margaret took her place at dinner between Walter and the clergyman of the parish. The words she had overheard sounded in her ears, and she kept repeating to herself, "The sooner you go the better." Was Edmund going?—where?—when? One lingering hope remained. Was it possible that he was about to solicit his father's consent? She glanced at his face. It was gloomy and sad. Not once did his eyes seek her's; when he raised them, they invariably turned towards her sister, but with an expression of gloom and resentment that almost amounted to fierceness. Ginevra was as pale as a sheet, and Margaret felt bewildered and frightened, but not jealous, as in the morning. She resolutely avoided responding to the glances which Maud was directing towards her, and as soon as it was possible, she gave the signal of withdrawal; as she stood by the door to let all the other ladies pass, Edmund, who had opened it, bent forward when Ginevra went by, and slipped a note into her hand. He had not seen that Margaret was behind, and she only remarked as she followed her sister into the drawing-room, that she seemed ready to faint, and grasped the back of a chair for support. She would not for worlds have revealed to Maud what she had just seen; an unutterable pity seemed to take possession of her soul, and as her sister left the room with faltering steps, she felt no irritation, nothing but a vague foreboding of evil for herself and for others. Maud, repulsed in some attempts at conversation, seized on a book; Mrs. Warren, contrary to her usual habit, was abstracted and silent; Mrs. Thornton, alone unruffled and undisturbed, maintained that sort of uninterrupted small-talk, which, unprovoked and unrewarded, pursued the senseless tenor of its way, through all the varied accidents of life. Later in the evening, when most of the company had assembled in the music-room, Maud began talking of the ball and of the charades, and making various plans about them. She had just allotted a part to Edmund, when Mr. Warren interrupted her by saying—

"Do you know that he talks of running away? I believe we are actually to lose him to-morrow."

"What, Mr. Neville, is it possible?" Maud exclaimed; and Margaret and Ginevra raised their eyes at the same moment.

"I have had letters from Ireland, which oblige me to go home," he answered briefly.

"And when shall you settle at Darrell-court?" asked Walter.

"That depends entirely upon circumstances. Perhaps very soon—perhaps *never*."

Maud looked at Margaret, but she was sick at heart, and did not return the glance. The approaching days, which she had at one time looked forward to with so much pleasure, presented to her now the most irksome prospect, and she felt a vague wish that something might happen to stop a course of proceedings that seemed empty folly when all the spirit that had actuated its conception had disappeared. She wondered that rational beings could dance, and act, and play like a parcel of children. "Was life given us for such purposes?" she mentally exclaimed; and then she thought that life, as it appeared to her at that moment, was a sad, a dreary, an unprofitable boon—dim and colourless, like the landscape on which the sun has ceased to shine—long as a tale whose interest is exhausted—insipid as a fruit that has lost its savour. Engrossed by her own thoughts, she scarcely attended to a single word that was said to her, and when asked to play, she went mechanically to the pianoforte, and went through a sonata without once looking about her, or uttering a word in answer to the compliments that were addressed to her; for she played well, and the nervous uneasiness of her mind seemed to give strength to her fingers and expression to her touch. She had just risen to return to her work, when the butler walked up to Edmund Neville, and said to him eagerly—

"Sir, your dog is here. He has found you out."

A scuffle was heard at the door, and a large mastiff of the St. Bernard breed burst into the room, and rushed to his master with all the impetuosity of joy and exulting recognition.

"Oh, what a magnificent creature!" exclaimed Maud Vincent, and bent down to caress him. He growled at her, and she withdrew alarmed. Margaret and Mrs. Warren also vainly tried to approach him, and Edmund called him towards the door, when suddenly leaving his master, the dog approached Ginevra, smelt her dress an instant, and then uttering a low joyful cry, jumped upon her, licked her face and hands, and laid his large head on her knees. She caressed him an instant; and then pushed him gently away. Edmund said, aloud—

"I suppose, Signora, that old Bruno acknowledges you for his countrywoman?"

The colour rushed into her cheeks; perhaps these words brought

to her mind her own snowy Alps, and the Italian valleys at their feet, for she snatched the dog in her arms, and laid her face on his shaggy neck. Twice she repeated his name with a kind of passionate fondness, as if she lingered over the syllables and fixed them in her memory.

"You should *improviser* some stanzas, Signora," observed Mr. Warren, in honour of the dog who has paid you so signal a compliment."

General exclamations broke forth in support of Mr. Warren's suggestion. Edmund at the same time said something in a low voice to old Bruno, who had returned to him, and Ginevra's eyes fixed themselves upon him with an earnest steady gaze that seemed to make him uneasy; the colour deepened in his cheek, and leaning against the chimney, he hid his face with his arm. Still her eyes followed him, as if unconsciously; but in a few seconds she fixed them on the dog, who was now lying at her feet, and in a low deep voice, whose accents fell on the ear like the whisperings of an Æolian harp, she repeated some stanzas in Italian, the sense of which may thus be rendered in English:—

"Friend of the wanderer! Guide in the storm! In thy native mountains thou art wont to seek the lingering life that is ebbing away in the grasp of death. The voice of the torrent, the fall of the avalanche, the smooth and fatal whiteness of the deep valley, cannot blind thy instinct or deceive thy sympathies.

"Brave dog of the St. Bernard! Tried friend of the wanderer! When the shades of night have closed about him, and the precipice is yawning at his feet, and the peaks of the Alps, in their snowy shrouds, hang over him like ghosts, and he gives himself up for lost, it is then thy familiar bark, thy warm breath, thy strength, and thy tenderness, revive him. O, thou friend in need! O, thou guide in darkness! But is it given to thee, too, to read the tearless eye, and discern the struggles of the soul under the smooth surface of apparent calmness? Does some strange instinct tell thee where a human heart is throbbing in silence, like the torrents of thine own Alps, when an icy prison binds them?

"The first breath of summer will burst *their* chains; *they* will spring forth, exulting into life, and gladden the valleys with their cataracts of foam, their rainbow colours and their deep songs of joy. The Spring must come to them; the sweet breeze of the South must waken them again to life and to liberty; but the whisperings of hope—when will they reach the heart that is waxing

cold in its misery? The sunshine of love—when will it melt the icy prison where the soul is struggling in silence?

“Thy kind eyes, thy warm breath, cannot do it; thy strength is vain, thy pity is useless. It lies not with thee to comfort the sick at heart, or to revive the spirit which man has blighted. Go back to thy mountains, brave dog of the St. Bernard; go to the snow-drifts, and bid them yield their victims; call to the abyss, and bid it give up its dead; seek for life in the glaciers, and carry warmth to the perishing: but come not in thy impotent love, and in thy vain compassion, to speak of hope to those whom hope is forsaking, or of joy to those whose joy is departed.”

The voice of the speaker was hushed, and seemed still to vibrate in the hearts of her hearers. Her attitude did not change; her eyes were still fixed on the dog at her feet, who was licking her hand gently, as if afraid of disturbing her. Mrs. Warren fidgetted about, and tried to say something in praise of the verses. Mrs. Thornton, who had not understood them, declared it was wonderful, but that she wished it had been done in English. Mr. Warren, Walter, and Maud, all seemed to feel that there was something in this scene beyond what met the eye. Walter drew near to Margaret, and, as if by accident, he took hold of her hand, and pressed it. Ginevra was the first to move; she walked slowly towards the door, but stopped before she reached it, and looked back towards the place where Edmund was standing. For the first time that evening he looked at her; their eyes met; he saw an expression of such intense imploring entreaty in her's, that he seemed to forget himself, and started forward as if to go to her; but he stopped, and sitting carelessly on the music-stool as he passed the pianoforte, he laid his hand negligently on the keys, and played a few notes of a melancholy and expressive air. The colour returned to Ginevra's cheek as the sounds reached her; a slow faint smile flitted over her face; once more their eyes met, and then she left the room; while Edmund, seizing a newspaper, threw himself upon a couch, and hid his face with it. Maud went to the pianoforte, and after running her fingers along the keys, she called Margaret, and said—

“Have you ever heard the famous air in ‘Guido e Ginevra?’” and she played the same notes that Edmund had just imperfectly, but distinctly, rendered; and then as Margaret stood by with an anxious and bewildered countenance, she added—

“The words are as touching as the tune;” and she sang, in French,

the well-known air which ends with these oft-repeated words :

*" Je reviendrai pour dire encore
Le nom si doux de Ginevra."*

Margaret went to her room, and sat down by the fire, with her face buried in her hands. She had not spoken to Edmund, or even looked at him, as she had left the library ; and it was only now that she remembered that if he went early the next morning, she should not see him again. It had not occurred to her that this was possible, and a sharp pain shot through her heart at the idea. Her maid came in to undress her, and commanding her voice as well as she could, she inquired at what hour Mr. Neville had ordered his carriage.

" At six," Grace replied, and Margaret's heart sank within her. A moment afterwards there was a knock at the door, and Mrs. Dalton put in her head, and said—" Here is a note, my dear, which Mr. Neville asked me to give you. He was so sorry not to have seen you leave the room, as he wished to say good-bye to you."

Margaret took the note with a trembling hand, but she could not open it before others. She dismissed Grace, she kissed Mrs. Dalton, shut the door, pressed the note to her lips, and burst into tears. She dared not open it; a faint hope still flickered in her mind, like the expiring light of the candle which Grace had just extinguished, and left on the table. With a superstitious anxiety she watched it rise, and fall, and sink as with a hopeless despondency, and then shoot up again with a kind of fierce resolution, and then burn dimly and faintly, and then throw out two or three sparks, as if it strove by a last effort of feeble strength to keep off its approaching end. " If it hold on but one second more," thought Margaret, as she broke the seal of the note in her hand, " I shall not despair." Her fingers trembled, and the inclosure stuck to the envelope; once more a spark gleamed in the blackened wick, but disappeared before her eyes had glanced over the now unfolded paper, and read the courteous but common-place farewell which extinguished the last lingering hope of her aching heart. She threw it into the fire, but snatched the shrivelling paper before the flames had entirely consumed it, and with a sort of faint pleasure perceived that the writing was not yet all destroyed—the signature was still visible. She smoothed the paper, folded it, and cried bitterly. It was a great trial, and it was her first trial. She had never parted before from any one she loved, and she was afraid of

her own feelings when she should wake the next day, and remember that Edmund was gone. She could not rest, she could not even attempt to lie down; but heaping fresh coals on the fire, she sat on, with her eyes fixed on the French clock on the chimney-piece, sometimes clenching her hands as if in anger, sometimes with the tears rolling down her cheeks, and her head reposing on the back of the arm-chair, like a child exhausted with crying. The clock struck five, and she heard a sound of steps in the passage above her room, like somebody walking very lightly. In a few seconds' time she heard a door closed in a slow and cautious manner at the end of the gallery on which her own room opened, and then everything was quiet again. A moment afterwards Margaret started up in her chair, and exclaimed to herself, "O shame, shame!" and then again buried her face in her hands. Unconnected words and sentences fell from her lips; a strange contest seemed to be taking place within her. Once, overcome by fatigue, she fell asleep, and then woke up and cried out, "O no, Maud; O no." And an instant afterwards, she said, as if musing over the words—"Worse than a coquette?" The clock struck six; she was getting very restless and feverish, and began to walk up and down the room, and then, in a few minutes, she opened the door, and looked down the dark gallery. At the farthest end of it a speck of light was visible; it was from the chink of a door; it was scarcely perceptible, but it was there, and the door was Ginevra's. "O that I dared open it," she exclaimed, "that I dared burst into that room, and kneel to her whom I wrong so grievously, whom I suspect—"

The handle of the door on which her eyes were fixed softly turned, and then she heard again the sound of steps, and her soul sickened within her; she thought she knew the step, she had so often watched its approach. It had once been music in her ears; and now, that slow and cautious tread sounded like the knell—not of her happiness, that seemed gone already,—but of all her future peace of mind.

"I will speak to her," she exclaimed. "It is a dream, perhaps, and a horrid one. To see her will dispel it."

She crossed the gallery with trembling steps—she paused at the door. The sound of deep and stifled sobs met her ears—she opened the door; Ginevra was on her knees, her hair streaming over her face, and her whole frame quivering with emotion. At the sound of the opening door, she started up, and extended her

arms wildly, pushing back the hair from her face, and uttering a sort of cry of hope and surprise, and some Italian word of endearment. Her eyes were blinded with tears; but in an instant she recognised Margaret, and said, "Sister!" in so gentle, and utterly mournful a tone, that it sounded like a cry for mercy. Margaret stood transfixed, bewildered, unable to collect her thoughts; but her eyes fell at that moment on a travelling fur glove that lay on the carpet close to the door. She knew it well, and a tumultuous tide of passion rushed over her soul, sent the crimson blood into her cheek, and heaved in her swelling and indignant breast. With flashing eyes and curling lip she held it out to Ginevra, who took it mechanically, and pressed her other hand on her throat, as if to subdue the convulsive agitation of her frame.

"What do you wish? What do you want, sister?" she asked, as if she did not know what she said.

At that moment the sound of carriage wheels was heard, and both sisters started.

"Yes," exclaimed Margaret, in a loud voice, as the sound died away in the distance—"yes, he is going! he goes! and would to Heaven he had never known you or me; would to God he had never set his eyes upon us, and brought misery to me—and to you. Oh! what has he brought to you? I know not—I dare not—I cannot think or speak; but guilty, very guilty you must be, Ginevra—for darkness, and silence, and shame have attended your actions. A false innocence has been on your brow, and a false virtue on your tongue. You have deceived me with every feature in your face, and with every accent of your voice. He is gone; yes, thank Heaven! he is gone; but peace, and hope, and trust, are gone too, for ever gone, from this, my once happy home. O, may he never return! May my eyes never behold him again! May his own conscience, if deceit and treachery have not for ever hardened it, torment and punish him for the misery he has brought upon me,—aye, and upon you," she continued, (as Ginevra faintly murmured, "For God's sake—for mercy's sake, do not curse him, Margaret,")—"you, my fallen, my most unhappy sister. O Ginevra! Ginevra! was it for this that you were made so beautiful, so highly gifted, so captivating, to be only so infinitely vile. Ginevra, I could hate you for the injury you have done me, if I did not pity you from my soul. You, who know so well, who can talk so well of pure, and noble, and holy things, you cannot be hardened—you cannot be so dead to all feeling—"

Was it the calm of death; was it the deadness of the soul that made those pale blue eyes so clear and mild, in their meek and most expressive sadness? Was the look of tenderness with which she watched the excited and quivering features of her indignant sister, another piece of well-acted deceit; and the convulsive energy with which she pressed to her heart the small crucifix she wore round her neck, another proof of hollow formalism or miserable hypocrisy?

"Sister," she said at last, when, exhausted by her own vehemence, Margaret fell on a chair with her face hid in her hands—"sister, you must think ill, very ill of me; I cannot expect, or even wish that you should not. No, Margaret, always shrink from the very first approach to evil or deceit. Shrink from it as from a poisonous serpent, and abhor it whenever and wherever you meet with it. But be merciful to the sinner, while you condemn the sin! Believe that, notwithstanding the strongest and most conclusive appearances of guilt, there may be—excuses, perhaps, or—bear with me, Margaret, listen to me—dangers, trials, Margaret!" she continued, drawing nearer to her sister. "I am still very young, and though I seem sometimes so calm and so strong, I can hardly bear the burthen that is laid upon me. I do not ask you to help me; for none can do that but God. I do not ask you to forgive me, for I may not now tell you how much or how little you have to forgive; but spare me, pray for me; pray that the acute sufferings which day by day I endure, may expiate whatever has been guilty in my life; and, O sister, this is my most ardent prayer, that I may one day hear from your lips that you are happy again."

Margaret waved her hand impatiently; Ginevra wrung her own, and gazed upon her as if she would have read into her soul. She then stood before her, and, in a tone of voice gentle, but firm, addressed her thus—

"Margaret, it signifies little whether it be through my fault or through my misfortune that your hopes, and what you now call your happiness, are destroyed. You *never* can be Edmund Neville's wife; and *never*, even in your most secret thoughts, must you allow yourself to think of him as a husband or as a lover. I care not what you think of me; I care not now what impression you carry away with you, nor how you treat me in future, nor how you speak of me to others; but this conviction you *must* carry with you when you leave this room, and never lose it again as you value *all* that you believe me to have lost."

Margaret started up, caught her sister's hands, and, with an eagerness amounting to violence, exclaimed—

“Tell me what you mean. When you wept and kissed my hand just now I thought you guilty. Now you speak with a strange audacity, and I could almost fancy you to be innocent. If you are so, speak; speak, Ginevra. Tell me any tale you choose, and I will believe it, or else let me leave the room and never trust in any one again.”

“Go,” said Ginevra, calmly and solemnly, “go, and never ask me again to speak of myself. Only remember my last words, and lay them to your heart. Our paths of duty are different, and though we may live together, if that even be allowed, we must never forget that an invisible barrier has risen between us, which you cannot—and I dare not—remove. If, with a great patience and a holy trust, you will bear with me, and suspend hard thoughts and abstain from harsh words, it will be a great and wonderful effort of virtue; and hereafter, my sister, you will be glad to think that you did not break a bruised reed—but if you cannot, then let God's will be done. Be it trial, or be it punishment, I am ready to receive at your hands far more misery than I have inflicted upon you. Only”—she stopped, hesitated, clasped her hands in supplication, and then, with a burst of such agony as she had not given way to before, exclaimed—“only, only spare my father!”

Margaret held out her hand without looking at her; but as she was leaving the room, she returned impetuously, flung herself into her sister's arms, and both wept with uncontrollable emotion; and when these two fair creatures parted, it was with a heavier weight of sorrow on their spirits than such young hearts are often doomed to endure.

CHAPTER XI.

When Margaret awoke on the following day, after two or three hours of restless and feverish sleep, she felt totally unequal to the labours of the day—that heavy labour especially of entertaining friends, and disguising her own feelings; but the recollection that others would connect her illness, if she admitted it, with Neville's departure, gave her strength to rouse herself, and to surmount her dread of encountering the eyes of her family, the presence of her sister, and above all, the flippant remarks and sharp interrogatory glances of Maud Vincent. As she passed the hall clock, she started at perceiving how late she was, and hurried into the breakfast-room. Ginevra was in her place making tea, and looking perfectly calm, though paler than usual. She silently put within her sister's reach whatever she wanted for her breakfast; and at the moment that Mrs. Thornton was about to cross-question her grand-daughter about her looks, which certainly were not satisfactory, she diverted that lady's attention by a well-timed inquiry about the efficacy of some homœopathic powders administered the day before to the schoolmaster's wife. Maud was watching Margaret, partly from curiosity, and partly from real interest; she could not form any conjecture that satisfied her as to the state of things which Edmund had left behind him, and she was longing to be alone with her, that they might talk over his departure, and form plans for circumventing the enemy, as in her own mind she designated Ginevra. But this was not easily achieved; when they moved into the drawing-room, both the sisters sat at the same table, and Maud's efforts to induce Margaret to withdraw elsewhere with her were vain. She had fetched her pencils and her colours, and began painting some figures in her sketch-book with a resolute application that baffled all attempts at conversation. Maud grew provoked, and asked Walter Sydney if he had seen Mr. Neville before he started. He said he had not; he was off by six o'clock, he believed: and he too looked at Margaret. No blush was on her cheek, but her lip slightly quivered, and she gave, perhaps unconsciously, an expression of

scorn to the face she was painting. Mr. Warren came into the room at that moment, and after taking up a newspaper for an instant, and playing with the ears of Ebro for another, he came up to the table, and said to Ginevra "Put on your things, Signorina, and come and look at the skaters in the park." To Margaret's surprise Ginevra instantly consented, and left the room to prepare for walking. It was a glorious winter's day, and the sun was shining brightly. Mr. Warren was waiting on the steps of the terrace, and when Ginevra appeared at the hall-door, and walked towards him, he said to himself, "Now for it," like a man who is going to pull the string of a shower-bath. She joined him, and they descended towards the river, where several of the servants and a number of village boys were sliding and skating with some little skill, and a great deal of merriment. They reached the pretty bridge at the lower end of the park, and wrapped up in fur cloaks they sat down on the arch to watch the scene below. Mr. Warren pulled some of the grass from between the stones, knocked about the loose bricks, hummed, whistled, seemed embarrassed in short—a strange feeling to him; he had not been embarrassed when he went up for his degree at Oxford, nor when he made his maiden speech in the house of Commons, which he soon gave up, as too fatiguing; nor on that eventful occasion when he proposed to Mrs. Warren, which he did in so abrupt and off-hand a manner, that she had first answered, "No, thank you," not comprehending it was the offer of his hand she rejected. But he *was* (in his way, at least) embarrassed now; and said, without looking at his companion—

"You know that Edmund has been speaking to me of your affairs? It is a difficult business, Signorina."

"Can you help us?" she asked in a low voice.

"Only by telling you the exact truth."

"Speak," she said again, and clasped her hands with a nervous contraction.

"That my brother-in-law will ever consent to your marriage is as great an impossibility as that this tree should walk across the river and take up its position on the opposite hill. Upon my word, I should as soon expect the one event to occur as the other. He is the most conscientious, the most prejudiced, and the most obstinate of men. He has *sworn* never to admit a Catholic into his house. He has made various sacrifices to the fulfilment of that oath. He has neglected claims which might have been established to considerable property, from a determination not to have any dealings

with Catholics; so you may imagine what chance there is of his consenting to the marriage of his only son with a person of that religion. No, I will not deceive you on that point. If Edmund should persist in marrying a Catholic, he will be disinherited, without the shadow of a doubt; and I must also add, in fairness to him, he *cannot*, for your sake as well as his own, run such a risk, or rather incur that certain penalty. Brought up as he has been in the most extravagant manner, fonder of luxury than any human being ever was, accustomed to gratify every whim as it arises, head over ears in debt already, and disinclined or unfit for every profession—by urging him to such a step, you would be plunging him and yourself into hopeless beggary; you would destroy every prospect of happiness, nay, of respectability, for him, and act as his worst and most cruel enemy. As you care for him, as you value his peace of mind, his reputation, his honour, Signora, you must give him up.”

“And if I *cannot* give him up?” she repeated slowly, with her eyes fixed on the ground.

“Why, in that case, I am sorry to say so, but he really must give you up.”

“Did *he* say so? Did *he* say *that*?” asked Ginevra, grasping Mr. Warren’s arm.

“No, but *I* say so, and you must feel it,” he added coldly. She released her hold, and hid her face in her hands.

“I am vexed, my dear Miss Leslie, that you take it so much to heart, but indeed it is inevitable.”

She raised her eyes one moment, and her lips murmured “God give me patience.” Mr. Warren looked at her, and seemed struck with the expression of agony in her face. He pitied her, and said in a low voice—

“There would be *one* alternative, one resource.”

“What?”

“A change of religion,” he said, without looking at her, and affecting to gaze through his spy-glass at the skaters below.

For an instant her eyes flashed fire, but a holier expression soon succeeded that first glance of indignation, and she gently but resolutely uttered the word “*never*.”

“You will get accustomed to the idea.”

“Heaven forbid!” she replied.

“Why, if you could be convinced, what a good thing it would

be. Cannot you stretch a point in such a case, and persuade yourself to believe—”

“Mr. Warren,” she answered with a calm manner, but with a nervous voice, “if I could do violence to my own soul, discard my faith at will, and call that error which the evidence of my reason, and every instinct of my being, affirms to be eternal truth, I might go a step further in my daring apostacy, and at last deem heaven itself a dream, and hell a fiction; and then it is not at the change you propose that I would stop. *There*,” she said, and pointed to a spot where the ice was broken, and the rapid river was seen flowing underneath, “there lies my temptation; a refuge from the misery of this hour, and a less dreadful self-destruction than that which you propose.”

Almost unconsciously, Mr. Warren laid hold of her as she leant over the bridge; but she turned to him, and a faint smile passed over her face.

“O, no! My guardian angel has not yet forsaken me. I believe,” she said, and raised her eyes to heaven. “I believe, and I can afford to suffer.”

“You think hardly of Protestants, Signora, if even a grave in that dark river would seem to you a better alternative than to adopt their faith.”

“Say than to renounce my own,” she eagerly rejoined; “the sacred truths we hold in common are part of the creed which I would rather die than forsake!”

“Then what is it you feel about us?”

“Inasmuch as you are Christians, the deepest sympathy—inasmuch as you are Protestants, an earnest hope that to the secret spirit God vouchsafes his inward revelations of light and of peace. Who can judge by what rays he illuminates the mind, or by what mysterious teaching he raises a soul to heaven and himself? but to abandon the truth when our hearts have received it, to cast away the pearl of great price that once was our’s, to have had faith, and to lose it, to have knelt in breathless awe and in speechless adoration, when God had been near us and within us, and then, with our lips, to protest against, and in our acts set at nought, the greatest and most awful of His gifts to man—this is a moral suicide, which none but a Catholic can conceive, because none other can incur its misery and its guilt.”

Ginevra’s earnestness overpowered her, and she remained silent till Mr. Warren again addressed her.

"Heaven forbid that I should strive to persuade you to act against your conscience! I admit that if your convictions are unalterable, you cannot of course give them up; but in that case it is much to be regretted that you ever entered into an engagement beset with so many insuperable difficulties! Such a foolish, hopeless affair!" he repeated, with that sort of impatience which good-natured and matter-of-fact persons experience at what appears to them the needless sufferings which others entail upon themselves by giving way to their feelings; but he was touched by the mournful eloquence of Ginevra's eyes, which were raised to his with a kind of mute appeal from the sentence he had just pronounced. Again he suggested, and again she rejected the only alternative which presented itself to his mind, and at last provoked with himself and with her, and wearied with the discussion, he exclaimed abruptly, "Well then, keep your faith, and give up my nephew. You must choose between—"

"God and man," she solemnly replied; "thank you for those words; they have given me strength. Now let us return home. You said you could not help me, and you were right."

"You have a great sacrifice to make," replied Mr. Warren, "but young as you are, and with a long life before you—"

"Yes, a long life—perhaps as long as his," she added in a low voice.

"You will feel satisfied at having released him from a painful position. As the cause, though the innocent cause, of his ruin, you never could have been happy."

Once more she glanced at the smooth river at her feet, and then at the blue vault of heaven over her head.

"Now you will both start afresh in life; you will have nothing with which to reproach each other."

"No, we must not reproach each other," Ginevra mechanically repeated; and they walked on in silence, except that Mr. Warren now and then made an observation tending to enforce the necessity of the sacrifice he had urged her to make. When they were within a few steps of the house, she suddenly stopped, and said in a low deep voice, "Are you *sure* that you have told me the truth?" There was such intense misery in the tone with which this was uttered, that Mr. Warren startled, and felt shocked at having been the means of inflicting it, but he could not retract, and the tear that glistened in his eye gave a death-blow to her hopes. He felt then for her, but saw no means of escape. She pressed his hand, went

up to her room, and was alone for an hour, looking her fate in the face, and struggling against despair. It was true, as she had said it herself, that Ginevra Leslie was very young for the load of care, for the heavy burthen which weighed on her spirit, and taxed the energies of a character which nature had made ardent, and to which education and circumstances had taught self-control. Full of that indomitable fire which genius kindles and passion nurses, she had taken life and its mysteries and its realities, as if by storm, and at thirteen she had ceased to think, to speak, or to feel as a child. The strong religious principles which grew with her growth, and modelled her whole being, grappled with that nature, and curbed its impetuosity. Her imagination, her talents, her enthusiasm, had been directed to one end by the influence of a religion, which, while it is ascetic in its discipline, and uncompromising in its morality, deals with each human being according to his secret needs, and purifies while it exalts every aspiration of his soul. She had seen in the gorgeous temples of her own land the riches of earth, the precious marbles and the sparkling gems, the gold of the mine, and the pearl of the ocean lavished in profusion on the shrines of the Almighty; and she had learnt, at the same time, that the precious things of man's heart and of man's brain, its pearls of great price, its treasures of deep thought, its gems of countless value, should be laid upon the altar of God, not to be destroyed, like the holocausts of old, but to be hallowed and exalted by the light of the sanctuary. Every inspiration that raised her soul from earth was directed to heaven; each burst of enthusiasm was sanctified by a sacrifice; the consciousness of superior power was incitement to new exertions, and the revelations of her own genius, startling appeals, to which she responded with uplifted eye and with bended knee. When the day of trial came, the same influence saved her from despair.

Her story was a strange one, and must now be briefly told. Consigned in her infancy to the care of her mother's relations, she had been brought up in an old mansion, whose departed grandeur had left traces of its existence in the fresco paintings which still lingered on its walls, and in the mutilated statues, the broken fountains, and the avenue of cypresses which ornamented its gardens. One suite of apartments in this abode was occupied by Father Francesco, who was at once the friend and the chaplain of the owner of that old palace. His name has already been mentioned in this story as the uncle and the guardian of Ginevra Ferrari, the

mother of our heroine. The simple furniture of these rooms contrasted with the magnificence of the gilded ceilings and the painted walls. One small gallery, that led from the hall to the chapel, was well stored with books, French, Latin, and Italian. A writing-desk that stood by one of the high windows, and a pile of heavy folio volumes that lay at its side, gave indication that their owner had not neglected to improve by study the abilities with which Nature had endowed him. The chapel was rich in comparison with the rest of the building; and the relics of past splendour, which elsewhere had been suffered to decay, were carefully cherished, and seemed to render a silent homage to the sanctity of the spot, where night and day a lamp burned before the altar, and shed a mysterious light on the carved effigies and the sculptured walls of that secluded shrine. On the opposite side of the building another lamp often burned through the long hours of night, and still faintly glimmered when the glory of the rising sun overpowered its feeble rays. This was in the studio of Leonardo Ferrari, the artist, who some twenty years before had been the friend and the companion of Ginevra's father. Devoted to his art, engrossed by that ruling passion, day and night he worked with an unwearied energy that left him no time for rest, and no care for the outward world. The only object that won a smile from the ardent painter, or beguiled him for an hour from his own life-destroying toils, was his sister's child, the little Ginevra, whose voice and whose eyes were the music and the sunshine of his lonely existence. In that singular home, like a flower that blooms unseen on the walls of a ruined cloister, she spent her childhood and advanced towards womanhood.

Between the aged priest, whose treasure was in heaven, and whose spirit seemed only to linger on earth for her sake, and the impassioned and often disappointed artist, who found in her presence and in her youthful enthusiasm, a refuge from the feverish dreams that pursued him, her young life took its course, and her young spirit its direction. Other circumstances also combined to mould her character and her mind, and to stamp them with originality. By her father's express desire she had been early instructed in English, and furnished with a library which comprised all the best works, both ancient and modern, which could give her a familiar acquaintance with English literature. She had studied Milton as much as Dante, and loved Shakspeare better than Ariosto. The rich stores of English philosophy, of English eloquence, and

of English poetry, sunk into a mind which the blue skies of Italy, and the deep sense of what was beautiful in nature and in art, had ripened into early maturity. She learnt of Father Francesco, whether on her knees in the chapel, or with her books at his side, to connect every emotion with a duty, every exertion with a prayer, and in the homes of the poor, or by the beds of the dying, these lessons assumed a reality which no subsequent impression could efface. No whisper from the world without had disturbed the even tenor of her life; the pale water-lily floating on the silent pool of the deserted gardens in which she loved to wander, seemed an emblem of herself, of her unsullied purity, of her calm existence, and of her unnoticed beauty. But the time was approaching when the storms of life were to sweep over that tranquil surface, and stir up in its source that well-spring of suffering which lies hidden in the depths of every human destiny. First came the day when a sacred duty, an imperative summons to a distant scene of action, called away Father Francesco from his home, not as had been often the case before, for a few months, but for an undefined and uncertain period. The first tears that had filled Ginevra's blue eyes since the day of her infancy, flowed in speechless sorrow as she received his parting blessing, and for the last time knelt at his side at the same place where, some years before, he had received her first confession, and now his voice had faltered slightly, as he concluded the sacred rite, and pronounced the words of dismissal, "Go in peace, and let us pray for one another." They had been the last she had heard from his lips; this had been her wish and his; long must they be treasured in her heart, long must be her struggles, and fiery her trial, before the same voice shall speak—if ever, on earth, it shall speak again of peace in her ears.

Alone with Leonardo Ferrari, she exercised for a few months a ministry of consolation—a mission of tenderness, which required all her intelligence and gentleness to sustain. His spirit had been too keen,—his sensibility too ardent,—the visions of future fame too delusive, and the disappointing realities of life too overpowering for health of mind or of body to remain unimpaired. A desponding languor, or a feverish restlessness, alternately depressed his spirits or harassed his nerves. With more talent than skill, with more genius than power, he toiled day and night, won praise from others for productions from which he himself turned with disgust; and the while his strength was failing, and his life slowly ebbing. Like an angel of peace, Ginevra stood beside him, and sometimes her words

or her caresses would soothe his agitation, and win a smile from his care-worn spirit; he would cast aside his brushes, turn away from his easel, and suffer her to lead him out into the balmy atmosphere of an Italian spring, into the beautiful gardens of the Palazzo Giusti, or into the picturesque streets of Verona. Gradually, as his strength diminished, he seemed more indifferent to the objects which he had so ardently pursued. He would look mournfully round his studio, and contemplate with a painful earnestness the picture which twenty years before he had painted in Rome, and which was the original cause of Leslie's marriage with his sister. He had never parted with it, and now that the evening of his life was closing in, it seemed dearer to him than ever; the memories of the past took the place of the eager anticipations of the future, and they seemed to concentrate upon Ginevra as the sole link that connected them with the present. But the frame was sinking, and the mind was worn out, sore, and disturbed; it could not dwell with calmness on any subject of interest; and the more intense grew his affection, the more acutely self-tormenting were his thoughts. She was consigned to his charge—she was alone in the world—her father in India. Father Francesco in South America. They had left her to him; they had thought him young still in years, energetic in character; and youth, and strength, and life, were failing. He felt as if he could have died in peace had her fate been decided, and her happiness secured. His restless eyes would wander from her mother's picture to herself, and an almost fierce impatience possess him when she smiled gaily upon him, and moved about that silent mansion like a ray of sunshine in the house of mourning.

About ten months after Father Francesco's departure, a young Englishman came to Verona, and visited the studio of Leonardo Ferrari. The same picture which so many years before had riveted Colonel Leslie's attention, captivated his fancy. While he lingered near it, he happened to glance at the garden below, and saw Ginevra tying up some of the roses which hung in garlands from one cypress tree to the other, and smiling at the little peasant girl who was gathering into her lap the shower of rose leaves which fell about her head. It was a pretty picture, and for a few minutes Edmund Neville watched it, and then started with surprise as a sweet and powerful voice—an Italian voice—sung in English, only with so much of foreign accent as gave the words a pretty distinctness, the song in Cymbeline :

"Hark, hark, the lark at Heaven's gate sings,
And Phœbus gins arise,
His steeds to water at those springs
On chaliced flowers that lies;
And winking Mary-buds begin
To ope their golden eyes,
With everything that pretty bin :
My lady sweet, arise!
Arise! arise!"

These words were adapted to an Italian air, and the effect was altogether so peculiar, that he felt as if he was dreaming; and from that day began a dream of bliss which ought never to have been yielded to, or never to have been dispelled. He came to gaze again on the face that had bewitched him—on the voice that had entranced him. He lingered in the studio, he visited the chapel, he explored the ruins, he spent hours and days with Leonardo, whose spirits seemed to revive in this intercourse with one whose manners and whose language reminded him of the only happy period of his blighted existence. He told him the story of Colonel Leslie's second marriage, and the secret of Ginevra's half-English origin. He clung to his society with a morbid predilection, and when he saw the signs of dawning passion in his piercing eyes, and the impetuous workings of that passion when once aroused, he felt as if a load of care had been removed from his breast. He saw that the spell that had bound him was as powerful as it was intense, and that Ginevra herself, at first unconsciously, then with heart-misgivings, and at last with all the earnest tenderness and simplicity of her character, yielded to its influence, and in return for his ardent and devoted affection, gave the deep enduring love of her young heart. He saw it and rejoiced, for he never doubted the purity of Neville's intentions, and he would have done him injustice if he had. Whether such a temptation had ever crossed his mind in the early days of his intercourse with Ginevra, and before he was aware of her relationship with Colonel Leslie, none can tell; but if it ever did, no traces of it remained, as he became acquainted with her character, and instinctively felt that she was one of those with whom, even in thought, he dared not connect aught of shame or dishonour. The only son of over-indulgent parents, whose prejudices he had never yet opposed, of whose boundless kindness to himself he had repeated proofs; far from his own country, from his old associations, he lost sight of the immense difficulties which a marriage with Ginevra would present. Blinded by passion, he foresaw indeed that his father would refuse his consent if it was

asked, but never doubted for an instant that if his marriage was accomplished he should soon be received into favour, for he knew that his parents would be punishing themselves by withholding their forgiveness; the alliance with Colonel Leslie's family was honourable, and the fact of his second marriage had long ago been recognised by his relations. His only desire, therefore, was to obtain Ginevra's consent to an immediate union, and in this object he was well seconded by Leonardo; to him he diminished the amount of opposition which his family were likely to offer to his wishes, and from her he altogether concealed it. He was of age, he was independent, his parents he told her had always wished him to marry young. Colonel Leslie had been a friend of his father's at college, and would certainly approve of his daughter's marriage with an Englishman, whose fortune was ample, and whose family was ancient. Ginevra was inexperienced, and totally ignorant of the ways of the world, but her instinctive delicacy of feeling, and tenderness of conscience, revolted from the idea of marrying without the express consent of her own Father, or of father Francesco, and with her arm round Leonardo's neck, and a deep blush on her cheeks, she implored him not to urge her to become Neville's wife for at least a year, and to write to both her absent guardians, before a final consent was given to—

“To your happiness, Ginevra, and to what will secure my peace of mind—to what will enable me,” he vehemently continued, “to die without the anguish of leaving you alone in the world—to die without the burthen of earthly cares to draw my soul back from the opening vision of eternity.”

Ginevra pressed his hand to her heart, and her lips quivered.

“You are quite wrong in supposing,” he continued with feverish eagerness, “that I have not the right to sanction your marriage. You know how uncertain all communication with Father Francesco must inevitably be; and as to Leslie, he had but one fear which, through your childhood, has ever haunted him, and that is that you would take the veil, and never see him again but through the grate of a convent parlour. He made me promise that I would never consent to your residing, even for a short time, in a monastery, lest it might induce you to renounce the world.”

“There is no danger,” she said, and gazed at a letter in her hand, one of Neville's ardent and impassioned declarations of eternal affection; “no hope of it,” she added, and her tears fell fast on the paper.

"I have promised," continued Leonardo; "I have promised, and now when I die, Ginevra—when I have left you alone in the world—child of my heart! where will you go, what can you do? Fair as an angel, and helpless as an infant, who will care for thee, who will watch over thee? my flower, my treasure, my spotless lily. You do not know all I know. You cannot understand the dangers—the difficulties that will beset you. Here, in your home, you may not remain when I am gone; and if—" a sudden thought blanched his cheeks, and his agitation grew so great that he almost gasped for breath.

"I can never be alone, never forsaken, Leonardo mio," she gently whispered, and kissed his burning brow. He was ill, very ill, and fever and weakness were struggling for mastery in his exhausted frame.

"One last effort I must make," he feebly murmured, and raised himself on his couch. "Ginevra, if you did not love Edmund Neville, I would not ask you to give me peace at the expense of your own—to ease my aching heart and my harassed brain at the cost of one sigh or one tear of your's——"

"Oh!" exclaimed his niece, as she fell on her knees at his side, "if I did not love him I might obey you, and not tremble; but——"

"You do love him; your heart is his, and nothing stops you but a vague misgiving——"

"A nameless terror," she murmured. "O, Father Francesco! Father Francesco!"

"You know that Edmund has promised you the free exercise of your religion—that he respects your faith. Ginevra, my strength is failing. Hear my dying prayer. Do not call obstinacy conscience, or self-will self-sacrifice, Ginevra, dearest!"

A change came over his face, an expression of such intense anxiety that the poor child at his side could withstand it no longer, and murmured in broken accents—

"Do with me as you will, uncle Leonardo."

At that moment Edmund Neville joined them, the pale thin hand of Leonardo grasped his, and in a faint voice he said—

"She has promised."

The flush of joy in his dark eyes, the rapture with which he thanked her, the transports of happiness which he evinced, and the look of repose with which her uncle laid back his head on the pillow, and the faint smile which flitted over his countenance as Edmund

knelt at her feet, and imprisoned her hand in his, and gazed on her pale fair face, as if his life depended on her smile, all failed to give Ginevra that security which her throbbing heart so much needed. She had now promised, and she must not by her misgivings throw a gloom on the eve of her marriage-day, and poison the bliss of her lover, and the peace of her uncle. She smiled sweetly on both, and she prayed much alone in the chapel; but, about to be united for ever to one whom she loved and who loved her with such passionate devotion, she had no intoxicating dreams of future happiness—no brilliant anticipations of the life she was entering upon—something whispered to her heart that all was not right; and when she drew near the altar her step faltered, and the hand she placed in his was as cold as ice. For a few weeks after her marriage, nothing realised this presentiment. Leonardo seemed to revive at the sight of their love—it carried him back to the days when Leslie and his sister had also wandered under the same shades, and drained their cup of bliss in the short period of their married life. But this reprieve was only the last expiring effort of sinking life; his malady increased with fearful rapidity; and about three months after the marriage, he died with Ginevra's hand locked in his, and his eyes fixed on Edmund Neville with an expression of mingled confidence and supplication—a dying appeal, which seemed to embody the hopes and the fears which at that last hour were haunting his departing spirit. A few weeks after his death Ginevra was walking with her husband in the avenue near the Casa Masani, and for the first time since that event her grief was giving place to a feeling of enjoyment, which the calm beauty of the evening, and the glorious radiance of the sunset sky, was shedding in her soul. In the morning she had attended a solemn service for the repose of that spirit which on earth had been so restless—so keen in its aspirations—so self-tormenting in its delusions—and the silence of nature, in that her twilight hour, seemed to harmonise with the prayer which was still rising from her heart, with the sacred accents which were still lingering in her ears—and Edmund kissed away the tears that were slowly coursing down her cheeks, and watched with eyes that told a tale of passionate love for the answering smile that, like a ray of moonlight on the waters, had more sweetness than brightness, and more tenderness than joy. Edmund seldom spoke of the future, and she never asked. In her character and in her religion there existed a strong principle of self-oblivion; not merely the self-abnegation which can make sa-

crifices, but the forgetfulness of self which in religion produces an unlimited surrender of our whole being to the will and the disposal of Him by whom and for whom we were made ; and in human affections, a devotion which forgets what it gives in gratitude for what it receives, and when even that poor return is withheld, takes refuge in the consciousness that "It is more blessed to give than to receive," and is grateful still for its own boundless capabilities of loving and of suffering. Edmund's will was her law ; Edmund's happiness was her object ; her own she seldom thought of. But as they sat together that night, she felt a sense of happiness steal over her heart, and her spirits rose as Edmund told her that his love for her increased every day, that she was the joy of his soul, the one object for which he lived, the one being on earth for whom he would give up life and all things else, and all those impassioned truisms, those sublime common-places, which have been uttered by human lips and have thrilled in human hearts from generation to generation, and will be uttered, and will be believed, and will do their fatal or their harmless work, on to the time when time shall cease to be.

"Here is Ginnetta," said Ginevra, as the little Milanese waiting-maid approached, with something raised above her head.

"A post-letter, Signora," she exclaimed, and threw it into her mistress's lap.

It was directed in an English hand to Edmund, and he seized it with impatience, and tore it open. A dark cloud passed over his face as he read it. His colour deepened, his eye-brows contracted, his lip curled, and his whole bearing denoted agitation. He rose from the bench where they had been sitting, and walked up and down the avenue with hurried steps. When a vague presentiment of evil has haunted the soul, and it suddenly fastens on the truth, it encounters it with a desperate calmness that astonishes itself. Ginevra had never explained to herself what she feared ; now she seemed to understand it at once, and like a flash of lightning through her brain darted the thought,—“He is ruined, and through me !” Her hopes, her fears, her fate, her peace, were nothing—less than nothing—dust in the balance,—in comparison with that one thought. She went up to him and said, gently, “Edmund, I must see this letter. There must be no secrets between us.” He was rolling the paper in his hands while his eyes were darting fire, and his thin lips were tightly compressed. There was a mixture of childish passion and fierce concentrated resolution in his counte-

nance and in the tone in which he repeated, without listening to her—”

“They *shall* yield, by heaven, they *shall* yield.”

She turned very pale, and leant against a tree for support.

“Edmund, have you deceived me?” she faintly murmured, but did not repeat the words, when he turned towards her with a look of love and misery which pierced her to the heart, and held out his arms to her. She sank on the seat by his side, and took the letter from his hand; she read it, and a thousand new and startling thoughts seemed to rise in her mind during that moment. She understood the past; she foresaw the future; a fearful revolution was taking place within her. In his blind and selfish passion, this man who was by her side, who was holding her hand, who was watching her while she read,—this man had made her the instrument of his own ruin; had placed her in her unsuspecting helplessness, between himself, and duty, and honour, and happiness, and there—there she must remain, like the angel’s sword in the apostate prophet’s path, where the hand of God had placed her,—and from that path of duty and of misery she must not swerve. She saw it, she felt it; her heart sickened within her, her brain almost gave way; reason would have forsaken her, even love might have failed in that her hour of need,—but religion was there, and the torrent was stemmed, and the path was clear, and the victory was won. The past was irrevocable; the future must be met by him and by herself in the spirit of expiation,—where sin or error had been; of resignation,—where the sin or the error had been involuntary. No reproach passed her lips: there was reproach, and he felt it, in the increased paleness of her cheek, and in the tremulous accents of her voice as she asked him in a subdued tone—

“And *now*, my Edmund, what can we do?”

He hid his face in his hands, and remained silent. He dared not tell her how desperate was the struggle in his heart between his passion for her and his reluctance to forego those worldly advantages which his marriage with her threatened to destroy. It had never occurred to him for an instant to suppose that his father had the power, even if he had the will, to disinherit him, and this stunning intelligence was communicated for the first time in the letter that informed him of the strength and of the inveterate nature of that father’s prejudices against the religion which his wife professed. The faint rumour which had reached his home, and which

was supported by his prolonged absence, of an attachment formed in Italy, had raised in that home such a tumult of anger and apprehension as can be conceived only by those who have had to deal with characters such as that of Neville's father—too earnest, too conscientious, too lofty, not to inspire respect and attachment; and too stern, too inflexible, not to create despair in the hearts of those who see no point by which to approach, no weakness by which to soften, no emotion by which to work on its rugged conscientiousness and its smooth impassibility—and Mr. Warren, who was at that time travelling in Italy, was implored by his sister, Edmund's mother, to find out her son, to warn him, to save him; to adjure him by all the sacred ties that bound him to his family and to his country, to return at once to England, and to break off any intimacy which must inevitably end in bringing dishonour on the object of his attentions;—or, if he should be so reckless, so infatuated, so mad, as to think of marriage,—expose him to the endless resentment of his father, to the loss of all his worldly prospects, and to an eternal separation from herself. Mr. Warren was perfectly ignorant of his nephew's movements, and inclosed a letter to him to the banker, at Geneva, which was the last place from whence Edmund had written to him; he communicated to him the substance of his mother's letter, and added to it such legal particulars as gave to her expressions an overpowering reality. This was the news that had fallen like a thunderbolt on the heart of Ginevra's husband, and never did a more fearful storm rage in any human breast than swayed his in that hour. He loved her ardently; and even in that moment did not regret that he had bound her to himself by irrevocable ties; she was his, and must be his for ever; but the threatened consequences of that act must be guarded against, and his marriage remain a secret till such time as he should succeed in overpowering his father's objections; or, at least, in weakening the strength of his prejudices. Perhaps, also, some vague hope crossed his mind that he might work a change in her religious creed, and then the daughter of Colonel Leslie, and the convert to Protestantism, would be hailed by his family as the most welcome bride he could present to them. But it was difficult to look Ginevra in the face, and to propose to her a course of long and arduous dissimulation. It was difficult, while his protestations of boundless devotion were still echoing in her ears, to condemn her to a humiliating silence, and an equivocal position. Her eyes were still fixed on the fatal letter, and she was repeating, as

if to persuade herself, of the fact—as if hoping against hope—
“He did not know it; he was deceived himself.”

The flush of burning shame was on Edmund’s cheek; he drew her to himself, and whispered—

“Ginevra, you love me?” She pressed his hand to her lips, with more of unflinching devotion than of passionate affection. Perhaps he felt it, for with violent emotion he exclaimed, “Ginevra, you despise me.” There was no scorn in her eyes—there was no resentment in her heart—there was no thought of herself,—of her own bitter disappointment, of her endangered happiness, of her hopes deceived, and her confidence abused at the altar where she had surrendered her life, her fate, into his keeping,—and thrown at his feet, to be crushed or cherished at will, all save her faith on earth and her hopes of heaven. But in her face and in her soul, in her quivering lips, and her clasped hands, there was an expression of indescribable emotion as she looked at her husband, who, overcome with agitation, had again hid his face in his hands, and was vainly striving to address to her the words which were rising to his lips.

At last, with a strong effort, he mastered himself, and in rapid and incoherent language described the impossibility of owning his marriage at once, and braving the anger of his father. He told her that for her sake, as well as for his, he must use prudence and discretion in this matter; and as he spoke, he sought to deceive himself as well as her, and partly succeeded. Every word that he had said to her before marriage, every evasive answer with which he had baffled her timid but oft-repeated inquiries about the sentiments of his family, were present to *her* mind, as he rapidly detailed the difficulties that beset their path, the dark clouds that hung over their destiny, and the plan of conduct they must follow. Still she did not reproach him, but once she laid her hand on his and said—

“Edmund, you are the master of my fate, the ruler of my destiny. Ignorant and helpless I cannot withstand your will, or over-rule your decisions; but bear with me for a moment. I would not give you pain, dearest, or add to the bitterness of this hour; but pause, pause before you engage yourself and me in a course where truth will be a danger and deceit a duty. The sufferings of this hour (her voice faltered and her hand trembled) are the result of——”

“My boundless love for you—it knew no measure, Ginevra, and it feared no dangers.”

"Be true to it, and to yourself," she exclaimed; "take me to the feet of your father, and let my deep love, and my fatal ignorance, and——"

"Your too bewitching beauty, your too transporting loveliness," interrupted Edmund, as she stood before him, with tears streaming down her cheeks, and a deep flush tinging those cheeks which were usually as pure and white as the Parian marble.

"Plead my excuse and yours," she continued. "O Edmund, dearest Edmund, *truth—truth*, for Heaven's sake *truth*, and then misery and wretchedness, if God pleases. Life is short, my beloved and eternity is long."

She was looking more beautiful then than the instant before, for her eyes were raised to heaven, and the spirit of hope and faith was kindling in her glance and shining on her brow, but she had risen too high for him—she had scaled the mount where he could not follow, and soared through the clouds he could not pierce. The sound of those words, *misery and wretchedness*, had dragged him down to earth again, and he exclaimed with bitterness:—

"Proclaim to the world, if you will, that we are married. Refuse to grant me the short period of delay and of silence which I ask, and we are both undone; or consent for a while to submit to a painful necessity. Bear for my sake a few months of trial and suspense, and then—at your feet, in my arms, my Ginevra,"—he continued, as he knelt before her, and drew her fondly to his breast, "and then years of bliss will follow, and in their sunshine you will pardon the clouds which have obscured the first dawn of our happiness. You will forgive me, dearest, for having bound you to myself, for having seized on the priceless treasure of your love, and taught you to suffer through me—for me," he added, as her lips were pressed to his, and she murmured:

"Must you leave me, Edmund?"

"Not now, not yet."

She turned very pale, and said no more. That evening she glanced at her wedding-ring, and then drawing it from her finger she passed through it a black velvet ribbon and hid it in her bosom.

"If not there—*here*," she said, and in this simple manner gave her assent to the trial she was about to endure.

What tears she shed in silence—what deep tears that day's anguish left behind it, what fears haunted the night that succeeded it—fears such as those of a child who walks in the dark, who clings

with terror to the hand that leads him, but which he dares not wholly trust,—none knew but herself. But there was a light in her path even in that stormy hour; and narrow as was the way she trod, a ray fell upon it, and each step she took was firm, though the next was hid in darkness.

During the days that followed, Edmund was, by turns, gloomy and desponding, or joyous and sanguine, according as imagination presented to him the future in a dark or in a bright aspect. He was distracted about the present, and tortured his brain to devise some plan by which he could leave Ginevra in safety, and hasten to Ireland himself to pave the way towards the acknowledgement of his marriage. One morning, after he had spent a night of restless agitation, letters were brought to his wife, from her father, and from the English consul at Genoa, informing her that Colonel Leslie was returned to England, and on receiving the news of Leonardo Ferrari's death, had written to direct that his daughter should proceed to Genoa, there to join Mr. and Mrs. Warren, old friends of his own, who were on the point of returning to England, and who had agreed to take charge of her. There was a note enclosed in the packet from Mrs. Warren herself, written in a courteous and friendly tone, and expressing the pleasure she felt in the prospect of making Miss Leslie's acquaintance, and offering to come herself and fetch her from Verona, if it would be more convenient, or more agreeable to her. Agitating and complicated as the state of things was becoming, a smile crossed Edmund's countenance, at the strangeness of the coincidence which thus appeared to throw his wife under the protection of his own relations, and hazardous as was the step, and great as appeared the risks that attended it, he soon came to the conclusion that the summons must instantly be complied with, and the difficulties met as they arose, and braved if they increased. This turn in their affairs would enable him to proceed alone to Ireland, and Ginevra, once established in her father's house, acknowledged openly as his daughter, idolised as she must be by all who came near her, would stand in the eyes of his family in a very different light from the Italian girl, the niece of an Italian priest, the very name of whose country, and of whose creed, would be abhorrent to their most cherished prejudices. The sight of her father's handwriting strangely affected Ginevra, and for the first time a sense of guilt and remorse took possession of her soul. Instead of being, (as poor Leonardo had assured her,) in some remote part of India, he was returning to his own country at the very moment when she

had married without his consent, and she must meet him again with a secret in her heart, and in his home and by his side bear his own name, which she had neither the right to assume, nor the power to forego. Almost a child in years, quite a child in guileless simplicity, she was to begin life with a woman's heart, and a woman's hardest trial—married, she was to bear the torment of suspense and the burthen of long concealment—innocent, she was to endure the trembling anxiety, the keen apprehension of guilt—she almost flinched from the task, and her courage well nigh forsook her. But even remorse—if the nervous regret, the newly awakened pang of recollection could be termed remorse, where even error had scarcely been—was not selfish in that pure heart and gentle spirit. Her sin, for such she now called it, was confessed in deep patience, and each suffering in store for her she hailed as the purifying expiation which God would appoint and at last accept. On the following day, she spent an hour in the chapel, where she had so often knelt, and in the place where she had received Father Francesco's parting blessing, she prayed for him, and her heart whispered that he was praying for her. Perhaps it was his prayer which was obtaining for her at that moment the peace and the strength she so much needed. As the shades of evening were closing, Edmund Neville came to fetch her. He had stood without the church, and leaning against the column, he had heard her sobs faintly audible in the silence of the darkening aisle, and he had writhed with the pangs of self-reproach, and the bitter grief of parting; and when through the heavy folds of the curtained door she glided out into the moonlight, and stood before him with a smile of divine sweetness and calmness, his soul melted within him, and weeping like a child, he fell at her feet, and implored her forgiveness. She put her hand on his lips, she kissed his forehead, she murmured a blessing in his ear, and smiled through her tears. At last it was she who tore herself from his arms, who pointed to the travelling-carriage which was waiting at the gate, and who spoke of hope and of courage, as he almost cursed himself for the misery he was inflicting upon her and upon himself. It was not till she had lost sight of him, that she trembled at the thought of what the morrow would bring forth.

Instead of proceeding to England at once, he lingered for some weeks secretly in the neighbourhood of Genoa, where a long illness of Mrs. Warren's protracted their stay. To catch a glimpse of his wife as she passed through the rooms of the Palazzo—to meet her for an instant in the streets, and exchange a few hurried words

with her, was the whole object of his days, for separation and uncertainty had augmented tenfold his passion, and almost robbed him of his senses. At last she left Genoa, and then he travelled day and night to England. When he reached his home he found his parents in utter ignorance of the object or of the nature of his attachment; and before he could speak on the subject, two hours after his arrival, his father led him to the window, pointed to the ancestral trees, the wide lake, the smiling villages, the parish church, whence at that moment the bells were pouring fourth a joyous peal in honour of the return of the heir of those broad lands, and said, in a slow and impressive manner—

“Edmund, if ever in a moment of infatuation it should have crossed your mind to ask my consent to your marriage with a Roman Catholic, dismiss at once and for ever that thought, for I swear,” and he laid his hand on the large family Bible which was placed on the table, “by that sacred book, and that Heaven which it reveals, never to grant it. I have made your mother promise not to hear one word from you on this subject, or even to allow you to name to her the person, whoever she may be, who has suggested to your mind the possibility of such a marriage. Now we understand each other.”

He laid his hand on his son's shoulder. If he could have read into that son's heart, even his own stern spirit might have quailed:

After Mr. Neville had left the room, Edmund remained gazing on the well-known scenes, which even in their wintry garb were clothed in so much beauty. There was not a spot which did not remind him of his childhood, or of his boyhood, and the wild moaning of the wind through the leafless branches of the elm-trees was in his ears as the music of bygone days. The sound of the gong, as it startled him from his attitude of contemplation, had also a familiar tone, and in his own room the views of the Lake of Killarney, and of the Giant's Causeway, the crooked China monsters on the chimney, the few books and old pamphlets on the shelves, the embroidered screens, his sister's birth-day present, all carried him back to a time and a state of things he had almost lost sight of during the year he had spent in Italy. He went down to dinner, and in the old family portraits, the sword hanging over the chimney, (a relic of the battle of the Boyne) which he had often in his infancy climbed on a chair to handle, the large picture between the windows of the siege of Londonderry, all served to warn him of the deeply-rooted religious and political prejudices of his family.

He was silent and abstracted, and the conversation was chiefly sustained by his father and the clergyman of the parish. It often touched on the state of the country, and the religious animosity which prevailed in it. His heart sank within him as he listened to the bitterness of party feeling, which appeared in every word that was uttered; and when in the family prayers that night, Mr. Neville solemnly implored that his household and home might ever be preserved from the inroads of infidelity and popery, and never harbour a Papist among them, the image of Ginevra rose before him as she had stood, with her meek and fervent eyes raised to Heaven, pleading with him the cause of truth and of eternity. The next day he rode with his sister, Anne Neville, through the lanes and the villages which lay within his father's estates, and was cordially welcomed by the tenants. When he observed all that had been done to promote the comfort and the welfare of the inhabitants, and listened to the various details she gave of the schools which she superintended, of the new church which they were building in one spot, and the cottages they were erecting or improving in another, and watched her intelligent and animated countenance while she was speaking, he felt a new interest in the place, and a new sympathy with her. Anne Neville was one of those persons who, without any brilliant qualities or extraordinary charm, carry with them, through all the details of life, a quiet gaiety, a calm good sense, and a degree of modified and gentle obstinacy, that works its way and gains its end where more exalted or more dazzling qualities and powers might fail. She had more kindness than feeling, and more perseverance than zeal. She observed to the utmost the duties of her religion, and had little indulgence or sympathy for those who believed, or who practised more or less than herself. Without any vanity, (for praise and blame seemed equally indifferent to her), she had the very highest respect for her own understanding, and anything she did not herself discern, or feel, or conceive, was unhesitatingly set down as enthusiasm, or delusion, or perverseness. She never seemed to imagine that there might be depths in the human heart which she had never fathomed; needs in the human spirit which she had never experienced, bearings and relations between creeds and actions which she had never investigated, or indeed that there were more things in Heaven and Earth than were dreamt of in her philosophy. Too gentle in character to be ever violent in her expressions, too upright to be uncharitable in her judgments, she quietly brushed away from her path, and put

aside from her consideration, everything that did not precisely tally with her own pre-considered opinions. A clever American writer¹ has said that there are some points of belief which we must not be always reconsidering, but which must at once be placed on our shelves for daily use, and not for critical examination. Anne Neville's opinions were *all* of that nature, and there was no apparent crevice through which a new impression could have been inserted in her well-arranged, but closely packed understanding. That Edmund should have sympathised with his sister may seem extraordinary; but who has not felt that when they have suffered much through the intensity of their feelings, or the vividness of their fancy, there is a strange repose in the quiet round of daily duty, and of practical interests, which a well-regulated life presents. His love for Ginevra was connected with recollections of vehement joy, and of passionate emotion; her religion was the obstacle that stood between him and happiness; the source of acute misery to himself, and of tormenting anxiety for the future. He was capable of, but had no taste for strong excitements, and he easily persuaded himself that it was to Ginevra's religious creed he felt a rising repugnance, and not merely to the difficulties it placed in his way. There is so much that is excellent and attractive in any form of earnest religion, and old habits and associations have so much influence on the human mind and heart, that as he looked upon Anne with admiration and interest, he conceived an ardent desire, which soon amounted to a strong conviction, that his wife might be brought to adopt her views, and embrace the religion of her sister-in-law. He could not contemplate without dismay the possibility of foregoing, or risking the possession of those hereditary estates, which appeared to him more valuable than they had ever done before; and as he observed increasing proofs of the inflexibility of his father's character, and felt himself every day becoming more incompetent to contend against that iron rigidity of purpose; or even supposing the will to be equally powerful in both, he was conscious that in the struggle, all the advantages of position were against himself. Now, then, for the first time, the idea suggested itself to his mind that *Ginevra must give way*. He remembered how young she was; he tried to persuade himself that her convictions were not deeply rooted and that the example of others, his earnest solicitations, and the force of circumstances, might, after a short time, effect the re-

¹ Jacob Abbott.

sult he so ardently desired. So confident did he feel of success, that his spirits rose, and he amused his imagination with various pictures of the time when he should declare his marriage to the astonished world, and bring Ginevra home in triumph to his delighted family. His first step was to write to Walter Sydney, and propose to pay him a visit at Heron Castle. There were some matters of business pending between their two families, concerning the lands of Darrell-court, that were adjacent to Mr. Sydney's, which furnished a plausible pretext for this proposal. He felt an intense curiosity to see Ginevra's father and sister, and an inexpressible interest in observing all the peculiarities of that house in which she was so soon to be received under such strange circumstances.

Reckless as he was, he could not divest himself of a nervous reluctance to enter Colonel Leslie's house as a common acquaintance; and this, combined perhaps with an involuntary misgiving on Walter's part, occasioned the delay in his introduction, which had so much tantalised Margaret at the outset of their acquaintance. When he met her at Mr. Thornton's, the sound of her voice, and something peculiar in her expression, which reminded him strongly of his wife, almost baffled his self-command. When Walter's accident forcibly brought about his domestication at Grantley Manor, he shook off these feelings, and applied himself to the closest scrutiny of the characters, the feelings, and the opinions which would be likely to influence Ginevra, and to tell on her actions. Margaret especially, he watched with unremitting attention; but it was an attention so wholly selfish—his thoughts were so entirely absorbed by his own cares and projects, that it never once occurred to him that he was attaching her to himself and endangering her peace of mind. Once he was on the point of confiding to her his perilous secret, but rejoiced that, by leaving him abruptly, she had saved him from committing what, on subsequent reflection, appeared to him in the light of a fatal imprudence. Once, too, he was inclined to consult Walter Sydney; but he, too, had checked the communication he was about to make to him, and the estrangement between them, that had begun soon after his arrival at Grantley, deepened so visibly, that he soon forsook all idea of imparting to him the truth. And when in those brief moments of intercourse with Ginevra, which he could contrive to obtain after her arrival, he felt with a kind of helpless despair, that, devoted, tender, humble, and patient as she was, ready to bear everything from him, and everything for him, on the one point on which his hopes and his projects

turned he spent his strength in vain ; that his desperate efforts, his cold resolution, his fiery resentment, his subtle reasonings, and his passionate entreaties, swept over her constancy like the spray over the rock, leaving traces of its passage indeed, secret tears and silent pangs, but making no way, and gaining no hold ; when he saw this, he rejoiced, with a sense of escape from danger, that to no one had he confided the secret of the ties that bound them. He had tried her by every means in his power, and utterly failed. Jealous, restless, and miserable, he could scarcely bear his existence or command his impatience. He loved her with passion, and to leave her was misery ; and yet to stay, and day by day conceal his feelings, and watch her at a distance, and scarcely dare approach her, or for one moment fix his eyes upon her, or linger by her side—this was a torment he could scarcely endure. That his father should conquer in their trial of strength was conceivable, and irritating as he felt it, he could scarcely wonder at the result ; but that that gentle creature, all sweetness and submission,—that child of seventeen, whose heart was so entirely his,—should baffle and thwart him, and triumph over all his efforts to subdue her resolution and force her compliance, caused him at times such transports of rage, that he almost doubted if it was not hatred rather than love that he felt for her. But when he thought of going, of leaving that house in which she lived, that place where he could at least see her, hear her voice, and give way to alternate outbursts of anger and of tenderness, then he felt, by the pang that wrung his heart, that he loved her too deeply, too ardently, for the peace of his selfish and impetuous spirit. Her devotion to her father, her tenderness for her sister, her intimacy with Walter, the admiration she inspired to casual visitors, and the tone in which she was addressed in spite of the reserve of her manners, as one at liberty to receive the homage and the attentions of others, were all sources of indescribable torment to him. It appeared as if every one about her had greater claims upon her than himself, and yet he was her husband ; if he chose it, he might at once snatch her from that house, separate her from her family, and assert his right to her exclusive devotion. Sometimes he persuaded himself, in his suspicious irritation, that she did not wish their marriage to be declared,—that she had ceased to love him,—and that, despising him for his selfish cowardice, she felt satisfied with her present position, and willing to cast him off for ever. Her very patience and sweetness angered him ; and sometimes he, the deceiver and the tyrant, would think of himself as injured and ill-

used by his victim, because she only suffered in silence, and wept in secret.

On the day that preceded his departure from Grantley Manor, which was alluded to in the last chapter, he had received a letter from his sister, which mysteriously hinted at a report that had reached his parents, and thrown them into the greatest consternation. She entreated him to return at once to Clantoy, and relieve their minds from the suspense they were enduring. Perplexed and distracted, he resolved partly to confide in his uncle, Mr. Warren, and informed him of his attachment to Ginevra, slightly alluding to some previous acquaintance he had formed with her in Italy, and consulting him on the best mode of obtaining his father's consent to their marriage. He found his own impression of his father's inflexibility tenfold confirmed in this conversation, but at the same time a strong confidence expressed in the likelihood of Ginevra's conversion to the Protestant faith, if the urgency of the case was placed before her, and suffered to gain upon her mind by imperceptible degrees. Edmund's hopes were revived by this view of the subject; he began to hope that others might wield this engine of persuasion more effectually than himself, and he determined to leave the case in Mr. Warren's hands, while, in accordance with his sister's wishes, he himself for awhile returned to Ireland. But when he met Ginevra on the terrace of the park, on the evening of that day, and they stood alone together, with the dark wintry sky over their heads, and the gloomy future weighing on their hearts, the conflicts of grief and passion, of love and anger, burst all bounds. Her spirit rose in that hour, and the smothered fire which had mouldered so long in her breast, kept under by nights of prayer and days of struggle, broke forth at last, and the passion of her Italian nature shook, and almost convulsed her fragile form. As, in her own tongue, she poured forth the story of her wrongs, and shuddered herself as she told it, deep, deep into her own heart and into his she dived, and brushed aside, with impetuous and overpowering reasoning, the vain subterfuges by which he sought to keep the truth from her grasp; unrolled the past before his shrinking glance; and then, with his hand in her's, and pointing to Heaven with the other, exclaimed—

“And when at the last judgment-seat you stand, how shall you answer to Him who made you, for having tempted a human soul into destruction? No, Edmund, no,” she continued, while a torrent of tears fell on his hand, which she still clasped with both

her's. "No! you will never have to answer for such a crime. The day will come when you will bless God that I could withstand your tears, and wring your heart."

She left him abruptly, for the sound of footsteps had that moment startled them: but he was going the next day, and her conscience reproached her for her vehemence, and her heart smote her for what, in her sensitive tenderness, she called unkindness. Through that long evening, not one glance of affection could she obtain—not one token of pardon. She longed to kneel at his feet, and she could not even meet his eyes, or address to him a word. As the time of withdrawal drew near, her misery and her anxiety knew no bounds. When the dog, the old dog that had been the favourite companion of their walks, and the object of their care during the first weeks of their marriage, broke into the room, she felt as if he had come to plead for her, in that their first hour of real estrangement, and through the verses which she addressed to that mute intercessor, she made an appeal to the heart which pride and resentment had closed. The well-known air, which he so often had sung with her in her brief days of happiness, and the words of which formed an answer to her prayer, was a pledge of reconciliation. They met again, and the tears that were shed by both, and the silent pardon which each asked and obtained from the other, and a few faint expressions of hope on his side, and words of patience, of trust, and of tenderness on her's, and a long embrace, and a mute farewell, and that page of life was turned over; and the stormy interview with Margaret that followed it, opened a new era in Ginevra's singular existence.

CHAPTER XII.

On board the vessel which was carrying him from England to Ireland Edmund Neville stood, and as it approached the port where he was to land, he gazed on the fanciful forms of the clouds which were gathering round the sinking sun, and then on the light waves that were breaking quietly on the shore, and the repose of nature seemed in strange disaccordance with the feelings of his own breast. There was not a single point in the past or in the future on which his mind could rest with any sense of repose, and he looked forward with painful uneasiness to his arrival at Clantoy, and to the questions which might be put to him in consequence of the reports to which his sister alluded. *If the truth* had been rumoured abroad in some unaccountable manner, and had reached the ears of his family, what would be the result? A sickening doubt of his own rectitude crept over him. If everything should be at stake, and ruin stare him in the face, what should he do? What was there in himself, what steady principle, or what noble impulse, to set against the temptation of denying his marriage, of staining his honour with a falsehood? He searched his own heart; he questioned his own spirit; he weighed them in the balance, and found them wanting. Not even his affection could stand against the opposing force of selfish interest, and there was not one grain of principle to throw into the scale. It is a bitter thing to commune with one's own secret soul, and turn from it with contempt,—to see the stormy passions that swell about the heart, lulled into repose in some hour of solitary thought,—and then, through the still waters, to gaze into the depths of the abyss, and see the reflection of our own deadly selfishness. When, on landing at Belfast, Edmund threw himself into the carriage-and-four which was waiting for him, the rapid motion and the nearer approach to the scene of contest and struggle which he was anticipating, renewed the agitation of his spirits, and over and over again he rehearsed a series of stormy discussions, of charges repulsed, of questions evaded, of menaces resisted, of resolutions taken, and

strong will pitched against strong will in fierce and close encounter. Although the night was cold, he was in such a state of feverish excitement, that the wind that blew from the sea as he travelled along the coast was only refreshing to him, and the horses that were going at the rate of ten miles an hour seemed to him to linger on the road. As he was stopping to change horses at a little inn about seven miles from Clantoy, a man on horseback approached the carriage, and he recognised the voice of his cousin Charles Neville, a young clergyman whose living was within a few miles of Clantoy, but whom he had not seen during his last visit to Ireland.

"May I come into the carriage, Edmund? I must speak to you," he said in a hurried manner, and the step was let down, and as he jumped in, he was heard to desire the postboy to go on as fast as possible. His hand, when he pressed Edmund's, shook, and he could at first scarcely find voice to speak to him; but the words came at last, and suddenly and fearfully did they turn the current of excited feeling which was swelling in his companion's breast. That will which he had come to withstand, that iron resolution which had stood between him and his object, that violence he had meant to oppose by equal violence, or to deceive by ingenious evasions, was powerless, subdued, and silenced for ever by one mightier than itself. A rapid illness had carried off Mr. Neville after twenty-four hours of suffering, and twenty-four subsequent ones of sensible and rapidly-increasing exhaustion, and the messenger who had been sent to summon his son to Clantoy had missed him on the road. A cry of bitter anguish—a groan of horror—burst from the heaving breast of the startled and bewildered Edmund: he grasped convulsively Charles Neville's hand, and neither spoke nor moved, and scarcely thought during that hour's journey. He felt as if in a dream, so sudden had been the revolution in his state of mind; there was a sensation of weight on his breast, with a sharp pang of self-reproach, and then vague suggestions of selfish anxiety, dimly flitting like shadows in the mental vision, and driven away from the soul and brain by the force of present anguish and remorseful terror. Through the scenes which awaited him, in the desolation of that home, in the midst of the affliction which he witnessed and shared, still that state of feeling pursued him, only that on the canvas of that present affliction, more and more distinctly rose the personal fears, and hopes, and solitudes, which now thrust themselves forward

with resistless prominence. In his sister's manner, usually so calm even in hours of strong emotion, there was a degree of restless perturbation which struck him peculiarly. She did not seem absorbed in her affliction, as his mother was, though the expression of her countenance indicated much suffering, and her bursts of sorrow occasionally revealed how deeply she mourned; but her mind seemed intent on something besides her grief, and her eyes were so frequently fixed upon her brother with a kind of anxious scrutiny, that he would sometimes leave the room to avoid that silent investigation. He knew that she had been for some months past engaged to marry Charles Neville, and he felt a sort of impatient astonishment at the way in which he himself seemed to be a greater object of interest to her than her future husband, and at the pertinacious manner in which she sought his society, and, as he thought, endeavoured to insinuate herself into his confidence. As the moment approached when the will on which his whole fate depended was to be opened, his nervous irritation increased to such a degree that he could hardly remain in the house, and wandered for hours on the banks of the lake, or across the adjoining moors. Sometimes he felt an impulse to question Anne on the subject of his father's last impressions regarding his marriage, and on the nature of the report which she had spoken of in her own letter; but the very solicitude with which she seemed to seize on any opening that led to this subject, gave him a misgiving, and deepened his reserve. When he spoke of the future, and alluded to any plan connected with his taking possession of the estates, a cloud passed over her face; and he had once seen her glance at Charles Neville with an indefinable expression, which so haunted him on the following night, that he was on the point of seeking her room, waking her out of her sleep, and calling upon her to give up her secret thoughts, and relieve him, if she could, from the weight of intolerable suspense. But his pride forbade it; he could not easily suspect the sister whose kindness and affection he had never doubted, and of whose high principles and disinterestedness he had seen many proofs, of any selfish or mercenary thoughts; but still he could not endure to humble himself before her by betraying his own, and whenever she seemed disposed to lead to the subject, he shut himself up in silence and reserve. The day came at last on which Mr. Neville's will was to be opened and read in the presence of the connexions of the family, and the lawyers appointed for the purpose. Edmund was perfectly calm—he had mastered his anxiety, at least to outward appearance,

and with his hands crossed on his chest, and his eyes fixed on the ground, he listened to the instrument which was to decide his fate, without moving a muscle, or giving any other sign of interest than a respectful attention. Pride and a sense of the importance of self-command at that instant gave him strength for the occasion ; but his heart was beating a hundred to the minute, and when the preliminary sentences had been read, and through the legal technicalities that preceded it the real import of the will became apparent, a feeling of faintness came over him, which was combated by an effort that seemed almost to stop his respiration. Everything that for years had been possessed by his family, the townlands of Clantoy and Eskerreen, in Ireland, with their rent-rolls of ten and twenty thousand a year ; Darrell-court and its dependencies, in the county of —, in England ; a small estate in Scotland ; a house in Cavendish-square, in London ; and other minor bequests accompanying these, were successively and pompously enumerated, and all were left to him to hold and to keep at his pleasure, and to descend to his children after him, under proviso and condition that if he remained unmarried or died without heirs, the said estates and properties, etc., should devolve to Anne Neville, his sister, and to her heirs after her ; or in the event of his marrying or declaring a marriage with a person professing the Roman Catholic religion, that he should at once forfeit the possession of the said estates, properties, etc., and that they should at such time pass into the hands of the said Anne Neville, or her life failing, to her children after her, or her heirs failing, to Charles Neville, of—, and to his heirs after him. It is said that when a sentence of death is pronounced upon a man, he is neither as much agitated or as much shocked, as the spectators of his trial. The fact is, that he scarcely realises its meaning, nor can he present to his own mind its full bearing. In the same way, what Edmund Neville had so much dreaded, that his days had been restless and his nights sleepless, had now come upon him, and he scarcely felt more agitated when he left, than when he had entered the room an hour before. He had not raised his eyes once during the time which it had taken to read the will ; and when an old squire who was distantly related to him shook hands with him, as they passed through the hall into the drawing-room, and whispered, —“ Aye, a chip of the old block. A Protestant to the back-bone. No Popish wife, hey ?” the blood which rushed to his heart, did not even tinge his cheek. That evening, one of the lawyers who had been present observed to the clergyman at whose house he drank

tea, that it was easy to see by Mr. Charles Neville's varying colour, and the attention with which he watched his cousin, and the way he fidgeted in his chair, that the purport of the will was not a matter of indifference to him; and he added, that Mr. Edmund Neville seemed so very unconcerned in the minor details, and so absorbed in his own thoughts, that he was evidently well satisfied, and not at all surprised at its provisions.

When Edmund had watched the last person leave the house, and stood alone opposite to the blazing fire in the old-fashioned saloon, he leant his head against the chimney, and gazed on the curling and sparking flame with a dull sense of misery, which seemed gradually to invade and take possession of his mind. He felt, at that moment, utterly incapable of defining clearly to himself his own position, and still more of adopting at once the only honourable course he could now pursue; on the contrary, he saw no safety but in a desperate effort to conceal his marriage, at least, till he had time to consider fully all the bearings of the subject, and employed every means, and used every effort, by prayers, by threats, by all the powers which her youth and love had placed in his hands, to persuade or to compel Genevra to renounce her religion. This was the tacit purpose of his mind, the single ray of hope that crossed it. Her unbounded devotion to himself, her implicit submission to his will on all points but the one on which he had hitherto found her intractable, seemed to afford a chance of eventual success, or at least grounds of security against any immediate disclosure on her part of the secret ties that bound them, which delay would give him time to work effectually on her fears and on her hopes. Drops of cold sweat started to his brow as he thought of the consequences of a sudden emotion, an unguarded expression on her part. By a strange process of self-deception, his own assumption of a fortune and a position which he had in reality forfeited, and which he could only retain by a dishonourable silence, appeared to him in the light of a justifiable resistance to a revolting injustice, and to defeat its object by every means in his power, a simple act of self-defence; and yet, by an equally strange inconsistency, he felt it absolutely necessary to guard against any circumstances that might open Genevra's eyes, and awaken scruples, which, once aroused, would baffle all his sophistry, and enlist against him the uncompromising rectitude of her character. He instinctively felt this, and writhed under the consciousness. In the whole range of human suffering, there is not perhaps a more irritating description of feeling than

that experienced by a wholly undisciplined spirit, in its unavailing struggle against the force of circumstances too powerful to be controlled, and too galling to be endured. Edmund's worst enemy might have pitied him in that hour, for he was not only smarting under disappointment, harassed with anxiety, and leaning for support on a single hope, which had already been repeatedly deceived, and to which he clung with the desperate tenacity of a drowning man; but he was also parting at that moment with his own illusions about himself. Life was tearing from him that fictitious character which had so long, even in his own eyes, hung about him and flattered him into self-complacency. Henceforth his admiration of what was good and great would be a mockery of his own course. The generous impulses that all, even the most hardened, experience at times, would re-act on his own soul like the impotent efforts that are made in a dream, and Ginevra would be no more to him like a ministering angel at his side, but as an angel standing at the entrance of an earthly paradise, and forbidding him to enter. It was not that he formed at that time any deliberate project of retaining in the end, and under false pretences, a fortune which now legally devolved on his sister. He had a vain feeling that if Ginevra ultimately refused to give way in the trial of strength which was about to be engaged between his passions and her principles, the whole must be surrendered; but he clung to that hope with a tenacity which blinded him to all ulterior consequences, and made him reckless of all future embarrassments. Unable himself to conceive the nature or intensity of her religious convictions, he considered the whole question as one of personal influence, and it was on the strength or the weakness of her affections that he alternately reckoned with exultation or looked with apprehension. This added a fresh source of torment and disquietude to his already sufficiently trying situation, for he passionately loved his wife, and persuaded himself that if she finally withstood his threats and his entreaties, that it would be a proof of coldness of heart or of indifference to himself.

At that moment a deep sigh startled him from his reverie, and turning round he saw his sister seated in a chair close to him, and watching him, as usual, with an anxious expression.

"For Heaven's sake, Anne!" he exclaimed, in a hurried manner, "do not follow me about the house in that silent manner, and with that mournful countenance. I wish to be alone, and—"

"Edmund," she interrupted gently, "do not send me away so unkindly? Brother, dear brother!"

She laid her head on his shoulder and burst into tears; but quickly recovering herself, she continued—

“I have suffered much lately, or I should not be so weak; but, Edmund, I *must* speak to you—I must implore you to have patience with me.”

“Is there anything in which I can serve you, Anne? If there is, mention it at once. There is nothing I would not do for you or for my mother.”

“No, Edmund, it is of yourself I would speak, and—”

“Then I beg that you will be silent.”

“It is for your sake I would speak,” she said firmly, and recovering her self-possession. “Believe me, that truth and openness, and an honest purpose, would serve your interests far better than——,” she seemed to hesitate as to the word to be used, “than reserve.”

“I do not understand you,” he replied, in a cold and haughty manner.

“Cannot you understand me?” she continued, without looking at him; “if you really do not, then I thank God for it. If henceforward your course is simple and clear, and there is no struggle in your breast, though suffering there may be,—if no irrevocable step has been taken—”

He turned fiercely round, and this time his face could not conceal the horrible agitation of his soul; and if she had raised her eyes, she must have perceived it, but they were fixed on the fire, and she continued—

“If you can assume your present position with an approving conscience—”

“Anne,” he vehemently exclaimed; “Anne, I have no patience for such language as this; and if ever you venture to speak to me again in this manner, it will be the signal of an eternal separation between us. I am sorry for your disappointment,” he added, with a bitter sneer; “you had, no doubt, intended to gratify Charles Neville with the first intelligence of his future prospects, and with the success of this, your *sisterly* mission; but I am obliged to deceive your hopes, and to baffle your generous intentions in my favour and in his.”

This implied accusation restored at once to Anne Neville her ordinary self-possession. She became as calm as contempt can make one, and gazed on her brother with a feeling of pity that took from her all angry emotion. She answered coldly—

"I care not to repel a charge which is either an ebullition of temper worthy of a froward child, or a proof that you are utterly incapable of appreciating the character or the feelings which an experience of more than twenty years, which the remembrances of childhood, and the intercourse of maturer years, might have made you acquainted with. That you have thrown a bitter ingredient into my present cup of sorrow, and effaced, as by one stroke, the sweet confidence of affection which once existed between us, may one day cause you regret, and if ever—do not go till I have said this, for I *must* say it, and then set you at liberty from my presence—if ever you should feel that the burthen of a secret trial, or an overpowering difficulty, or the reproaches of your conscience meet you at every turn in your life and cause you intolerable suffering, then think of me, and of my words. Perhaps your own heart will have whispered to you in the meantime, that mine was not one likely to be swayed by a mean and disgraceful selfishness."

As she left the room without offering him her hand, or even looking at him, Edmund's heart sunk within him. For one moment he thought of calling her back, of throwing himself into her arms, of opening his whole heart to her, and a dim and distant vision of an honourable life of exertion and of sacrifice, begun in principle and ending in honour, floated before him. Perhaps Anne might never marry, and devote herself to him and his, and they might all live together, and then her influence over his wife might in the end be successful, and work conviction where persuasion and violence had failed. His heart seemed to soften and expand with this idea, and he moved towards the door with slow and irresolute steps; as he crossed the hall he looked up and saw Anne walking up and down the gallery, and speaking in a low voice, but in an earnest manner, to Charles Neville, whose arm was round her waist. His dream vanished, his suspicions returned, his heart hardened again, and the practical details of business, and petty exercises of authority in which he was soon involved, riveted with a thousand links the chains which fettered him to the course he had taken. He had not written to Ginevra since his departure from Grantley Manor, and now the moment was come when he must address to her the first intelligence of the fatal complication in which they were involved. It would have been natural that in a moment of such importance to the whole of their future lives, and of such keen suffering to himself, he should have disclosed to her without restraint or concealment, the exact nature of the difficulties in

which he found himself so unexpectedly entangled ; but, in the first place, there did not exist between them those habits of confidential intercourse which, under ordinary circumstances, spring up by a kind of moral necessity between husband and wife. The romantic and painful secrecy which had attended their married life, had established between them a strange reserve which had gradually deepened in proportion as time elapsed and their trials increased. The short moments of intercourse which were allowed them, were spent in conflicts of feeling and scenes of emotion which carried them beyond the sphere of everyday life ; while her youth, her inexperience, and her difficult position made her reluctant to press upon him questions which always appeared to embarrass him, and which he generally evaded with a gloomy countenance, or attempted to parry by evasive replies. In the present instance, he felt it more absolutely necessary than ever to keep her in ignorance of the exact nature of the circumstances under which he was acting ; so strong was his conviction, that with all her gentleness and ignorance, there was that in her character which, if once the case was fairly put before her, would overpower all his sophistry and break through the restraints she had hitherto submitted to. The time was therefore come, when truth and falsehood, love and fear, were to wield their keenest weapons, their most powerful engines. His heart smote him as he wrote the warrant that was to commit her to fresh sufferings, to prolonged trials ; his hand trembled and tears started to his eyes ; but the courage of selfishness is great, and he subdued his better feelings with the steady resolution with which some war against their bad passions,—or perhaps he persuaded himself that it was for her sake as well as his own that he must urge upon her acceptance, and even compel her to agree to the only course that would place her as well as himself, in a position such as it would be his pride and his happiness to behold her occupy.

Grantley Manor had been very gay that week ; so it was reported among the neighbours, so it was recorded in the county newspaper. There had been one night a ball, and dancing had been kept up till daybreak ; another night charades had been acted, and the lovely daughters of the hospitable owner (so the article went) had enchanted a select audience with their various talents for music, for acting, and for scenic pantomime, in which graceful amusements they had been joined by the amiable daughters of the Earl of Donnington, and all the fashionable young men in the neighbourhood. The first check which the amusements of the assembled

party had experienced was by the sudden departure of Mr. and Mrs. Warren, occasioned by the unexpected announcement of Mr. Neville's death. It was on the morning after the ball that he drew Ginevra aside, and communicated to her the intelligence which was likely to tell so decisively on her future destiny. Shocked and agitated, she remained silent, and saw him depart without venturing to ask the question which was trembling on her lips, but that seemed to choke her in the utterance, "Would this event remove or lighten the difficulties in Edmund's path?"

The days of suspense that followed were almost insupportable, and it required all the energy of Ginevra's singular character to command the agitation of her spirits, and the intensity of her anxiety. But since the scene with her sister, which had seemed to open a new state of things between them, she had a powerful stimulus to action, which roused all the capabilities of her nature. That sister's happiness became an object of passionate solicitude, and she watched every turn of her countenance, and every inflexion of her voice, as the merchant whose all is at the mercy of the wind and the waves, watches the clouds that gather in the distance, or the gusts that career over the ocean. As to herself, she could not fathom the extent of the trials that awaited her; but with a patient recklessness she lived on from day to day, like one who follows the narrow path with a precipice on either side, and never suffers his eye to rest, but on the next step he is about to take. The music that resounded in her ears, the scenes she was required to act, the songs which were allotted to her, and the applause which followed each exertion of her talents, seemed all a part of the pageant of life, and beneath it rolled a deep and ever-increasing sense of misery, which was stemmed and repressed by an ever-increasing strength; and sometimes, when her eye rested on Margaret, and a bright smile glanced across a face which seemed made for smiles, or when, in the midst of her own inspiration, she imparted to her a spark of that fire which fed her own genius, and saw others gaze with admiration at the beautiful countenance of her sister, when, lighted up by a sympathetic excitement, a sensation of pleasure stole over her own heart, and re-acted on her own spirits. And Margaret was watching too—darkly and heavily had weighed on her soul the suspicions, the evidence, of that fatal night—and wild was the tumult of emotion that followed it.

When Ginevra had left the room with Mr. Warren on the morning so often alluded to, she sat drawing with a feverish applica-

tion, and an aching, throbbing sensation in her breast; she could not analyse her own feelings, or form any plan of conduct for the future; and to all Maud Vincent's playful inquiries, or serious remarks, she could oppose nothing but a gloomy silence.

Maud, whose temper was good, though sharp, and who really felt for her, at last gave up the attempt in despair, and hastily seizing on a portfolio of drawings which Margaret had laid on the table, she began to turn them over with a careless impatience. One of them seemed to draw her notice more than the rest, and she held it up to the light and examined it with attention.

"Who drew this likeness of Ginevra?" she asked at last.

"What do you mean? There is no likeness of her that I know of," answered Margaret peevishly, for she felt provoked at the pertinacious manner in which Maud seemed to harp on that now acutely painful subject.

"Why, if that is not a likeness, I do not know what is!" she exclaimed, and threw the drawing before Margaret's eyes.

The resemblance was so striking, that no one could deny it; and at first Margaret looked at the sketch with a sort of vague bewilderment; but in another instant, a whole chain of recollections flashed on her mind—it was her own drawing, corrected and altered by Edmund Neville on the evening after Ginevra's approaching arrival had been made known at Grantley. Quick as lightning her thoughts flew back to that period, and recalled to her a number of circumstances bearing upon this one. She could not take her eyes off the paper, and unused to command her agitation, she betrayed it so visibly, that Maud exclaimed—

"Why, my dear girl, what is it makes you turn scarlet, and look as if you were going to cry? I am very unlucky in my remarks this morning. Every minute I get into some scrape or other. Is it the sight of your sister's demure countenance that sends the blood up into your temples as well as into your cheeks? If you had been caught sketching Mr. Neville's handsome face, you could not have blushed more desperately. Come, Margaret, do not be foolish; is this your drawing, as you said all these were; or does a tale hang on this particular performance?"

"O, it is nothing!" said Margaret, with a forced smile. "Put them all back, Maud; we must walk now."

"Anything to get rid of me this morning, I suppose—

"O woman, in our hours of ease,
Uncertain, coy, and hard to please!"

well, 'when pain and sorrow wring my brow,' Margaret, I hope you will be a 'ministering angel,' for you are hard enough to please now. Let me show this wonderful picture to Mr. Sydney; I hear his voice in the library."

"No," said Margaret, impetuously; "give it me, Maud—give it me, I entreat you!" Her gesture was so imperious, and her voice so imploring, that Maud yielded up the drawing without further contest, and only shrugged her shoulders with an expression of impatience, and muttered—

"Well! it is clear enough now, that thereby hangs a tale, and a long one too, like one of Mr. Thornton's longest. Make haste, Margaret," she added, louder, as Walter approached the table; "put up your mysterious picture, and hide it from all indiscreet observers."

"Has Margaret *any* mysteries?" said Walter with a kind smile, which was soon changed to a grave expression as he observed her evident annoyance, and the quick manner with which she drew together her drawing materials, and hastened out of the room without speaking.

"Margaret's temper is strangely altered," said Maud, when the door had closed upon her.

"Her temper is strangely tried," answered Walter, who had observed the sort of half friendly and half teasing persecution which Maud carried on. She understood what he meant, and answered carelessly—

"Yes, I am afraid she is sadly in love with Edmund Neville;" and having planted a sting in more bosoms than one in the space of an hour, she took up a French novel, and with her feet on the fender, and her hand on the back of an arm-chair, she devoted the rest of the morning to this engrossing occupation. Meanwhile, Margaret had followed up, in the solitude of her own room, the train of thought which had been suggested by the sight of Edmund's drawing, and a kind of half instinctive, half indistinct presentiment whispered to her that her sister was more sinned against than sinning, and awakened in her mind an intense desire to ascertain the truth, and to clear up the mystery which hung about her actions.

From the moment that this idea took possession of her mind, she felt less overwhelmed with disappointment and annoyance; the last twelve hours had been the most painful she had ever spent. Her love for Edmund had not been withered by slow degrees, but

blighted by a sudden and violent stroke. It still throbbed with lingering life, although the cold chill of destruction was rapidly gaining upon it. It was still alive in her heart, for she could feel it die, and its last struggles testified to the strength of its previous existence. She had been mysteriously, solemnly, charged on the peril of her soul's safety never to think of him, and nothing had filled the space which that one ceaseless thought had occupied. Now there was an engrossing and unselfish interest sprung up in her mind, connected with him, and at the same time divested of the softening character which the indulgence of her own feelings would have attached to it. And thus those two young girls entered on that life of gaiety which their home presented; each with an aching heart, each keeping aloof from the other, hand in hand in spirit, with a steady purpose in view, and a deep and ever-present interest in one another. Maud Vincent with all her lynx-eyed curiosity, Walter Sydney with all his sympathetic intelligence, could not read that riddle, or solve the secret of that strange position. One day there was, that Ginevra was sitting by Colonel Leslie while he was drawing a plan of operations for some Indian campaign, while Sir Charles d'Arcy, a young officer quartered in the neighbourhood, was standing behind her chair and watching its progress: a servant came up and put a letter into her hand. Colonel Leslie looked up and smiled as she left his side; "Something about the charades, love," he said carelessly. She smiled in return, and shook her head. That he might never suffer through her had been the most ardent of her prayers, and without a cloud on her brow she gazed on him, as he put his arm round her waist and looked into her eyes, till with a kiss he released her, and she went slowly out of the room. With faltering steps, she reached her own. Her heart fainted within her. Hope is sometimes still more difficult to bear than fear, or rather they are so closely allied, that each borrows from the other its most acute sensations. She broke the seal, and read as follows:—

"So much depends on the spirit in which you will receive and read this letter, that I entreat you to pause before you give way to your feelings, and take it for granted, that blindly to adhere under all circumstances to a predetermined course is the best and highest wisdom. I never felt to love you more than at this moment. All that you have been to me since the first hour of our acquaintance is present to my mind—your gentleness, your heroic patience and

generous forbearance under the most trying circumstances. I do full justice to the principles that have guided you throughout. I can even appreciate and respect the resistance which you have hitherto offered to my entreaties on a subject, on which your *feelings* are admirable, but on which an error in judgment misleads you. When we have adverted to this point, we have neither of us viewed it with sufficient calmness, or in the dispassionate manner which it demands. It is, doubtless, difficult to be calm, when on the decision of another the happiness or the wretchedness of a whole life depends, and when the obstacles that are raised against the only safe and proper course are the result of deplorable error and prejudice. You know well what I allude to; but I must inform you that the reasons which I formerly urged with such earnestness on your consideration, when I implored you to conform to the religion of your husband and your country, are become tenfold more imperative, from the tenor of my father's will. In short, there is no alternative now between that concession on your part, or such ruin and misery to us both as cannot be calmly contemplated. I will not go over the ground that we have but too often trodden before. I will only repeat that what I ask of you is no offence against morality; no abandonment of the service of your Creator—that service which every reasonable creature owes to Him, but which finds its expression in one peculiar form or in another, according to the infinite variety and incidents of climate, of character, and of association, which serve to produce a number of religions, all resulting from one source, and tending to one end, common to all, and needful for all. You received the tenets which at present you hold from early instructors, whose country and whose sympathies are entirely different from those of the land which is now become your home, and in which my interests and my duties are centered. How can you, at your age, have any assurance that what you now believe is not merely the Truth, but the *only* Truth? Why cannot you adopt the religious convictions of your family, of your friends, and of one dearer to you (if you have not deceived me on that point) than all the world besides? Will you run the risk of ruining me in every sense of the word, on the chance that your early teachers were better informed, and more enlightened, than those friends, of whose virtues and of whose understandings you have yourself such a high opinion. It seems to me, that, viewed in this light, you cannot hesitate any longer in following the line of conduct which alone can rescue us from an abyss of irreparable misery. The state of the

case is this : I am not only ruined but dishonoured ; unable to meet the most indispensable engagements, or even to look the world in the face again, if, while you persist in professing the Roman Catholic religion, I should acknowledge my marriage. I will never deny what you may choose to proclaim to the world, but this I plainly tell you, that on the day that you disclose this secret, (and I leave you at liberty to do so; this very letter in your hands furnishes you with evidence, and places me at your mercy,) I shall leave England for ever, and never set eyes on you again. If you persist in your present religious opinions, there are but two alternatives before you ; one is a silence which must forbid our meeting but in crowds, or our ever speaking to each other but in fear and trembling. The other is,—an eternal separation, with the consciousness that you have driven your husband from his country and his home—blasted his name, ruined his fortunes, and broken his heart. If the love you have professed to bear me is anything but a deception, or at best an illusion, I cannot doubt what your answer to this letter must be. When I parted from you, Ginevra, our misery seemed complete! How shall we meet again? If you remain blind to reason, obdurate to entreaty, sheltering yourself in a kind of high-wrought enthusiasm, of imaginary martyrdom, which doubtless is its own reward, that misery will sink into insignificance compared with the anguish I shall experience. I can scarcely command my feelings, or preserve my senses, when I reflect that an obstinate adherence to a bigoted creed alone stands between us, and divides two hearts, which love and religion itself have united. But why do I speak of love? You have never loved me as I love you ; you have never suffered as I have done, or I should not now be forced to plead so earnestly for what would have been granted long ago, if you really had felt for me but one particle of the love I feel for you. But now, before you set the seal to our fate, remember that in my family, threats, alas! are not vain words. A fearful example has just proved it, and you will find from bitter experience that mine will have a literal fulfilment if you should drive me to despair. Do not imagine for an instant that you can consult others, or open yourself to your own family on the subject. The slightest hint at the real state of the case between us, is enough to involve the most fearful consequences. None but myself can fathom the desperate intricacy of my position, and the least step you take in the affair, beyond the most implicit silence, will do the work of destruction as effectually as if you had

proclaimed your marriage before the assembled world. And this, I again repeat, you may do, and you will do, if you are indifferent to what becomes of me, or care never to see me again. Ginevra! if you write to me to come to you,—if, with the simplicity of a child, and the tenderness of a woman, you resign yourself to me, and as the Scripture itself directs you, learn of your husband in meekness and in submission; what days of bliss are in store for us, what a life of happiness before us! You, who are the only woman I have ever truly loved—you, who have already given me proofs of heroic devotedness, and borne with such gentle patience the strange sufferings of our lot, now that on one hand every blessing is within our reach, and every misery threatening us on the other—will you hesitate any longer? I ask of you peace—honour—happiness! and will you let an opinion, blindly received and blindly maintained, weigh against the fidelity you vowed to me, the submission you owe me, the love you bear me? Let conscience speak to you unbiassed by prejudice, and if you listen to its voice, this is the last time I shall have to tremble as I send—to tremble as I await—a letter from you. Ever yours,

“EDMUND NEVILLE.”

Ginevra was alone when she read this letter; but if any one could have seen her at that moment, perhaps they would have found it difficult to gain from her countenance a clear insight into the state of her mind. She walked to the door and locked it, and then came back and sat down near the table on which that letter was lying. She started when her hand touched it, as if there was danger in its contact. Twice she passed her hand over her brow, and then her face flushed violently; suddenly her throat seemed to swell and her chest to heave; with both hands she seized the velvet ribbon round her neck, and tore it asunder. The ring it held flew out and fell at some distance on the floor. She took the letter and read it again, wildly glancing from line to line with a bewildered expression of doubt, of misery, and of fear. When she came to the last sentence, she lighted a candle and held the paper to the flame. It burned slowly, she watched word after word, line after line disappear, till the fire reached her hand; she let it fall, and soon it mingled with the ashes. At that instant Margaret knocked at the door and told her that Mr. and Mrs. Warren were in the drawing-room, having come over to take leave of them before their departure for Germany. When Ginevra entered the room, Mr. Warren

was struck with the deadly paleness of her face, and felt painfully concerned for her; but he guessed not at the depth of the anguish which that face betrayed. It was not, as he imagined, the dream of a girl, that had just been destroyed—it was the whole life of a woman that had been blighted. His wife having accidentally left the room with Margaret, he found himself alone with Ginevra, and with evident embarrassment he endeavoured to address to her a few words of sympathy. This was more than she could bear, the struggle was dreadful; she would have given worlds to break that silence, to question him, to tear the veil from his eyes and from her own, and burst through the shackles which were driving the iron into her soul. But she could not speak and be calm. She could not command the tumultuous throbbing of her heart—she gasped for breath. All traces of colour vanished from her cheeks; her lips were partly open, but did not move. Her breathing was now scarcely discernible, so profound was the silence of her whole being. It was awful as the stillness that precedes the storm. Mr. Warren said, with hesitation,

“I hear that Edmund is miserable—that his father’s will——”

The name, the words, fell on her ear—and swift as the hurricane over the ocean, across that silent spirit swept a tide of passion too powerful for the slender frame that quivered with its violence. Her eyes flashed, her breast heaved; over her cheeks, her neck, her temples, rushed the crimson hue of indignant feeling, and words rose to her lips as keen as her anguish—as strong as her despair.

“And what is a man’s will? she cried with convulsive agitation. “What is a man’s will, that it should sever what God has united? Can the breath of his mouth, the stroke of his pen——. A will! a will! What will? In God’s name, Mr. Warren, is it His will or man’s will that must prevail? Heaven forgive me! I know not what I say,—my brain is giving way.”

She fell on her knees with her face buried in her hands. Love and terror were contending with that indignant passion, and in the fierce conflict every nerve was thrilling, every limb was quivering, every feature working. Like a ship that breasts the waves with every power it can command, she struggled, she fought, she wrestled with that great agony, and at last subdued it. When she lifted her head again, that vehement emotion had subsided. The silence that ensued was like the calm of Nature when the storm has passed away. The tokens of her deep misery, the signs of her bitter anguish, like the floating spars of a wreck on the surface of the

stilled ocean, were discernible in her mournful eyes and in her languid step; but the light of heaven was shining again on the waters of affliction, and she was gazing with firmness on their deepening course. She pressed Mr. Warren's hand as she left him, and wrote the following letter to her husband:—

“I will not reproach you for the past, nor remind you of promises, of assurances, that seem to you now as if they had never been. Of love and of misery I care not to speak. They have sunk too deep into my heart to find vent in words. What can I say to you that I have not said before?—how can I argue when my heart is breaking? But from your letter—your dreadful letter—I appeal to yourself; I call upon your conscience to witness against you. Oh, dearest Edmund, if it is a sin to lie to men, to lie to God is an unpardonable crime. If I was to abjure the faith which is as strong as life within me, if I protested by my acts, and with my lips, against what in my soul I believed—what in my heart I adored,—my very prayers would become insults to the Majesty of heaven. But is there indeed no alternative but that which you point out?—have I to choose between *my* guilt and *your* despair?

“Too much, perhaps, till now, I have yielded to your prayers, and blindly resigned my judgment to your's—proud and glad to suffer at your command, and for your sake. But now you have said too much, and too little. You have awakened fears that may not sleep again, and thoughts which cannot slumber. Vague assertions and mysterious warnings have not strength sufficient to bind me to a silence, which neither the laws of God or of man can warrant you in imposing upon me. The darkness in which you have involved me deepens every hour, and when in despair I would gain light at any price, you scare me with such fearful phantoms, or such dreadful realities, that I pause and shrink, and yield to the terror that besets me. A thousand wild fears and vague suspicions dart through my mind. I have risen at night, and made my way to the library, and searched in books, and read over laws and statutes, till my head has throbbed with fatigue and anguish. I can nowhere find an explanation of the fate you assign to me. I cannot accept it, Edmund, nor by a sacrilegious lie avert it; and yet I cannot, I dare not say that I have courage to brave your anger, your threatened desertion,—to draw upon you all the misfortunes you speak of. Have mercy upon me, and explain yourself clearly. Prove to me that it is just and honourable to keep our marriage a

perpetual secret; that you have the right to do so,—the right to compel me to silence by more fearful threats, by more powerful means, than if you pointed a dagger at my breast. Only prove to me this, Edmund, and I will be silent as the grave, till the day that death will give you freedom, and to me peace. Only, never forget, as you would not forget your soul's salvation, and your hopes of heaven, that what God has joined together, man cannot put asunder. Remember that I must ever stand between you and other hopes, between you and other ties, as a shade, a cloud, a blighting vision! O that it were not a crime to bid you forget me; that it were not a duty thus to cross your path and embitter your existence. Why it should beso, Edmund, why the pure gold of our love has turned into dross, you alone can tell. Why we cannot, hand in hand, meet with courage the evil days, the coming trials of life, and abandon *all* save truth and virtue, is more than I can conceive; but you terrify me with mysterious allusions, with fearful prognostications. What have you ever done—what can you ever have promised, to warrant such language? Believe me, there is no anger in my heart; only a love which grows wild with its own silence, and reckless of its own misery! Have pity on my anguish, and let my sufferings win from you a token of kindness, a patience for my grief. Yours in life and till death,

“GINEVRA.”

In answer to this letter Mr. Neville sent another; it was begun in a cold, concise style, evidently written with great bitterness of spirit. He gave no explanations, and offered no further persuasions, but only reiterated his former assurances, sarcastically charging her to follow the dictates of her own conscience, and sacrifice him without hesitation, if her religious scruples required it. He could only assert again, that the inevitable consequences of such an act would be to drive him for ever from his country, and involve him in irretrievable disgrace. At the end of the letter he lost the tone of self-command with which he had begun it, and complained with violence of the coldness of her heart, and of what he called her indifference to himself. With jealous susceptibility he had brooded over the expressions in her letter, in which she had spoken of a wish to release him from the ties which bound them, and of only claiming his fidelity, on the score of duty, and perversely inferred that she would wish to part with him for ever, and felt no regret at their separation, but from motives of conscience. He announced to her that he was going abroad, and should be absent

from England for some months ; that change of scene was absolutely necessary to him ; and that while she persisted in her present religious opinions, he could foresee no change in their mutual position, except one that would effectually prevent his ever returning to England. He again accused her of want of love for him, and of pity for his sufferings. He alluded to his own ill-health, and begged her to spare her reproaches and recriminations, which almost drove him to madness.

This letter he sent, and then, with his face buried in his hands, gave way to a burst of grief such as he had never before experienced. He pitied himself more than Ginevra, and perhaps he was right. The present and the future were gloomy enough, and there was not a ray of comfort to lighten that darkness. The examination he had made into his affairs had proved to him, beyond a doubt, that if his title to the property was forfeited, such hopeless pecuniary difficulties would beset him, such overwhelming claims for debts already contracted, that his situation would be worse than that of beggary. He had offended and estranged his sister, and already forfeited, in her eyes, and in those of the world, the merit of a ready resignation of the property ; and it was with a kind of dogged and sullen determination that he now resolved to maintain himself in his present position as long as a gleam of hope remained that his wife might be brought to change her religion. It was with a kind of reckless and fierce indifference that he left his fate in her hands ; at the same time there was in his heart a love for her, which added to all the misery he endured. He felt alarmed at the vehement emotion which the sight of her handwriting awakened, and at the relentless hold which his passion for her seemed to take on his feelings. He could see no happiness for himself with or without her ; there was nothing around him, or within him, that could supply the craving for happiness which pursued him. He was right to pity himself, and others pitied him too, when they perceived his altered looks and his careworn expression. He went, and she remained at Grantley. His last letter had carried conviction to her mind, insomuch that she could no longer doubt that some overwhelming difficulties threatened him, in the event of a disclosure of their marriage. What was the exact nature, or the extent of those difficulties, she could not fathom ; but after much thought and doubt, and hesitation, she at last resolved to observe, for the present, an absolute silence on the subject. Her resolution was confirmed by a letter, which she received about that time from Father Fran-

cesco. It held out hopes to her that, in the course of that year, he would return to Europe, and perhaps visit England on his arrival from America. As he had received permission from his ecclesiastical superiors to reside there awhile, before his return to Italy, this announcement was to Ginevra like a message from heaven, and confirmed her in the purpose she had formed, at the same time that it opened to her a prospect of guidance and support, such as no other circumstances could have presented. And thus she remained in her father's house, to some an object of strange interest, to some of enthusiastic admiration, to all perhaps of a nameless compassion; for all felt that her lot differed in some ways from that of others; that there was a cloud resting upon her—Walter Sydney called it a halo, so mild was the light of her eye, so pure was the tenour of her life. Margaret alone had seen that cloud gather, and knew the dark source from whence it rose; but even when it had weighed on that shrinking head, her own heart had whispered that it was laden with misery, and not with shame. Her own wild spirits, her childish glee, her thoughtless prattle altered. She seemed to view life differently from what she had hitherto done. Her own disappointment, the weight of a secret, gratitude for the quiet and spotless course of her own life, seemed to deepen and to strengthen her character. Then Walter Sydney's lessons began to tell, and the peculiarity of such an affection as his to strike her. The glimpse that had been given her of life, and of its miseries, had sobered, without chilling the ardour of her spirit; she seemed to discover that such an attachment as his, whatever its exact nature might be, was a treasure of inestimable value; and in her manner, with the same artless confidence as before, mingled a respectful tenderness which it had not yet evinced. A few months thus elapsed, and then Colonel Leslie informed his daughters that he had taken a house in London, and that in a few days they would remove there for some time.

CHAPTER XIII.

It was on a beautiful evening in the beginning of May, that Margaret Leslie walked slowly up the winding ascent, bordered with evergreens, which led towards Heron Castle. The delicate colours of the lilac and laburnum contrasted with the dark shining laurel leaves; the blossoms of the lime-trees perfumed the breeze, while the guelder roses spread beneath them a snowy shower of white petals. The rays of the setting sun came slanting through the spreading branches of the horse-chestnuts, and the birds were making that short and joyous twitter—that carol of glee—which rises from one bush, and then is answered from the recesses of another, taken up by the little tenants of some lofty branch, and then re-echoes before, behind, above us, in one clamorous concert of exulting melody. As Margaret went on she sometimes gathered a flower, and added it to those she already held in her hand, or she stopped before a lilac bush, of a deeper, bluer purple, than the rest, and bending over the fragrant branches revelled in their sweetness; sometimes she paused as an opening in the trees presented a view in the valley through which the Grant was flowing, and beyond which rose the woods and the grey walls of her own beloved home. It was a Sunday evening, and the sound of distant church-bells came floating on the air with a deep-toned harmony which suited the scene and the hour. The low, distant bark of the house-dogs, that peculiarly English sound, accorded with it also; and the whistle of some stroller in the fields below added to the sensation of grateful rest—of permitted and blessed repose—which stole over the heart on that Sabbath eve. It brought to Margaret's mind some simple lines which, in her childhood, she used often to say, and she repeated them now with the fondness with which we cling to any form of words that has ever translated for us the emotions of our heart—

“Is there a time when moments flow
More peacefully than all beside?—
It is, of all the times below,
A Sabbath eve in summer tide.”

The last word was on her lips when Walter met her, and drawing her arm within his, returned with her towards the Castle.

"This is very kind of you, dearest Margaret," he said. "I was going to Grantley, but this is far better. Where is Ginevra?"

"She parted with me at the foot of the hill, to go to the little chapel at Heron. It is the hour for what she calls the Benediction. It is a beautiful name for a religious service; but, in gazing on that pure sky, and at these divine works of God, I, too, feel as if I received a Benediction; and to-night," she added with some emotion, "to-night it would seem a parting blessing, for I shall not spend another Sunday at home."

Walter did not answer, but pressed her hand again as they crossed the flower-garden, which lay on the west side of the building, and advanced towards an open window where his mother was sitting. Mrs. Sydney's pale, thin features were lighted up at that moment by the rays of the setting sun; and the peculiar hue which this circumstance imparted to her black dress, her close cap, her very white hands, the large Bible in which she was reading, and the vase of flowers by her side, gave her the appearance of one of Rembrandt's portraits.

"How beautiful your mother looks at this moment," whispered Margaret to Walter. He smiled faintly and said,

"Yes; she has the peculiar beauty which belongs to old age. It speaks of peace in this life, and a hope beyond."

"Dear Mrs. Sydney," Margaret gently said, as she approached the window, and placed herself on the broad ledge between it and the garden.

"Your old place, darling : welcome to it on this sunny evening. You are a gude sight for sair e'en, as old Andrew says whenever he catches a glimpse of you. But you are not come to say good bye, are you?"

"No, not that exactly, but to spend my last Sunday evening with you."

"Aye, you have done that for seventeen years, I think;" and Mrs. Sydney's voice trembled a little; "and now you are going to leave us——"

"For a few months," Margaret replied, absently, and fixed her eyes on Walter's face. He smiled in answer to her glance, but the smile only stayed there while she looked : it faded away immediately, and he turned towards the gate, and walked slowly towards the conservatory.

"Walter does not look well," Margaret said in a low voice.

Tears which had been on the point of starting before this remark, rolled slowly down Mrs. Sydney's cheek. Margaret as she had often done when a child, hastily jumped into the room, sat down on the side of Mrs. Sydney's arm-chair, and putting her arm round her neck, said—

"Is not Walter well?"

"He is not ill, dear child."

"Then why does *he* look ill, and why are *you* unhappy?"

"Only a little dull, perhaps," said Mrs. Sydney, trying to smile, and effecting nothing but a slight quivering in the corner of her mouth.

"Mrs. Sydney, look at me. Now look at me."

Margaret had changed her position, and was sitting on a stool before the old lady. She had got hold of both her hands, and was gazing into her face with a mixture of tenderness and gravity, just modified by the least little degree of sauciness, which made her more irresistibly captivating than ever.

"Now, look at me, Mrs. Sydney, full in the face; and now, Mrs. Sydney, speak the truth, and tell me what it is that makes Walter unhappy."

"He is not unhappy, love."

"He *is* unhappy," retorted Margaret, vehemently, "and so are you!—and so am I—if you will not speak."

"Why, dearest child, what can I say? You know how much we all love you, and you are going, and then—"

"And then, what!"

"And then, when you are in London, you will—see people you will like—who will like you—and then you will marry—and Walter will be very glad—"

"Oh! Walter will be very glad, will he?" and Margaret drew one of her namesakes from the vase of flowers before her, and as she pulled the red and white leaves alternately, repeated mechanically to herself the old French charm, "*Je vous aime un peu, beaucoup, passionnément, pas du tout.*" While Mrs. Sydney went on in broken sentences—

"He says you ought to marry—and that you will marry—and that we ought to wish it—and that Mr. Neville is now so rich, and his own master—and if you meet Mr. Neville in town—and then we shall be very glad you know, darling; but but you will only come

here sometimes—once a year, perhaps—and that makes us feel a little dull, and sorry, perhaps—and—”

“Mrs. Sydney, will you tell Walter—will you please to tell Walter—that I shall never marry Mr. Neville. Whatever else may happen, that never can be.”

“Why not, darling?” asked Mrs. Sydney, with a little more animation of manner, and looking at the flushed and beautiful face that was lifted up to hers.

“Because I would rather marry any one in the world now, than him.”

“Even Walter himself, perhaps,” said a voice at the window.

Margaret started; Mrs. Sydney quivered; it was her husband’s voice; his touch was one which she dreaded on all matters of feeling, and he had now alluded to a subject which, beyond all others, she would have wished to withdraw from his grasp.

“*Even* Walter!” Margaret exclaimed. “That *even* is strangely out of place when connected with Walter’s name.”

“Why, you would not marry that fanciful old gentleman, would you?”

Mrs. Sydney’s hands trembled as she wiped her spectacles, and said, in a low voice—

“Oh, Margaret, never joke on this subject.”

Margaret pressed her hand, and with a bright colour in her cheek, and an earnest expression in her eyes, said to Mr. Sydney—

“If Walter’s affection for me was not that of a brother for the most childish and troublesome of sisters, I can scarcely tell how I should answer your question. As it is, it requires no answer. There: I am come to the last leaf of my Marguerite, and to the last bit of nonsense I shall talk to-night.”

A deep sigh from Mrs. Sydney caught her ear, and a murmured “Thank you, love!” followed it, as her husband walked on, with his hands in his pockets, and his back to the window.

“And if I am not to joke on this subject,” said Margaret, timidly, and resting her head against Mrs. Sydney’s knees, “may I know why? Yes, you are crying; I knew you were;” she continued, as the old woman’s tears fell fast on her head; “and that is right.—for to have a grief, and not to tell it, is a bitter thing—sad and bitter.”

“Sad, but not bitter in some hearts,” exclaimed the mother. “Oh no; not bitter in his. In mine sometimes, perhaps—I have so passionately wished him to be happy!”

"Not more than I do," Margaret said in a low voice.

Mrs. Syddley stooped and kissed her forehead. Margaret flung her arms round her neck, put her mouth close to her ear, and murmured—

"Would he be happy if I married him?" and then hid her burning cheeks on the neck of the astonished and agitated mother.

"Oh, Margaret! my child! my dear child! what have I said?—what have I done? It has been very wrong—he will say so. O, he must never know."

Margaret raised her head, and a bright smile passed over her face, as she said—

"Then how can we make him happy, if we never tell him?"

"O, but my child! it cannot be! It is not true—my head is quite confused. I am sure I have done something very wrong. Walter will never forgive me."

"What—he?" said Margaret, with another saucy smile. "But tell me, now that we mean to make him happy—tell me how unhappy he has been, and when it began?"

"O, Margaret!" cried Mrs. Sydney, with increasing emotion, "he has loved you from your cradle—he has adored you through your childhood—he has worshipped the ground you trod in thoughtless glee, and his whole existence has been one continual thought of you. I saw, not long ago, that the iron had entered into his soul: it was when the cloud first darkened your brow. 'I can bear anything but that,' he one day said, and I know he felt it."

The colour deepened on Margaret's cheek, as her own recent sufferings were alluded to. The wound was lately healed, and a shade of sadness passed over her features. She had committed herself more, perhaps, than if it was to Walter himself that she had held out the hopes which her words must have awakened in his mother's heart. She longed to be alone and to think. She felt suddenly frightened at the idea of seeing him again; she was not quite sure on what account; and when the door opened and Walter came in, her heart beat violently.

He sat down by her, and spoke in a quiet cheerful manner of her approaching absence, of her journey to London, and of the care he should take meanwhile of all that interested her at home. She gave him a long letter to read, which she had received that day

from one of her village *protégés*, and asked his opinion upon it. It was from a young orphan girl, in whose history they had both felt much interest. She had been crossed in love, as she expressed it herself, and deserted some months before by a young man, whose rank in life was somewhat above her own; and now she was urged by a neighbouring farmer to accept his hand. Riddell (that was his name) had loved her all along, she said, and she could find it in her heart to marry him, but she was doubtful still, and in many minds about it, and would take it as a favour if Miss Leslie would just advise her what to do. Whilst Walter was reading this letter, Margaret leant back in her chair, and looked at him with a sort of strange complacent curiosity. There was something very peculiar in the mixture of careworn thoughtfulness, and yet of deep serenity, which marked his countenance. The lines about his eyes and brow were strongly marked, and seemed to bear the traces of suffering; but his mouth, on the contrary, had an expression of repose and sweetness somewhat peculiar in a person of his age. His hair was black, and very slightly tinged with grey; it grew thickly on the sides of the head, but left the brow and the temples discovered. She gazed on that pale thoughtful countenance, and connected its expression with the many scenes of past life, which were now rising in her mind's eye, and remembered, with emotion, how much he must have borne, endured, and suffered, if, indeed, he loved her not as a brother, but as a lover. A lover!—she started almost visibly as the word crossed her brain. It seemed to her almost wrong to think of Walter as a lover, and he was so very unlike him who not long ago had held that character in her eyes. She shrank from that name, and felt frightened at shrinking. She would not willingly see him at her feet, or hear from him those words of love which she had longed to hear from Neville's lips; but she would readily place her hand in his, and walk by his side through life with a grateful heart and a hopeful spirit. He raised his eyes from the letter at that moment, and said—

“What advice would you give to this girl?”

“About this *mariage de raison*, do you mean?”

“Yes,” he answered; “do you think she would be justified in marrying, without more love than she seems to feel for poor Riddell?”

“That depends upon what Riddell expects.”

“True! but if he is satisfied with the grateful attachment she feels for him—which she describes herself as feeling?”

"If he is, I am," said Margaret, with a smile. "You are not romantic about your *protégés*, I see."

"That depends on what you term *romance*. Anny may find, in the depths of her own heart, a deeper interest for one who has loved her with the real romance of unrequited affection, than in the feverish dream which has haunted her imagination, rather than touched her feelings."

Walter looked at Margaret, and saw that her eyes were full of tears, and his mother rose at that moment and left the room. He folded the letter slowly; a kind of vague strange hope—an unnatural hope, it seemed to him—a sort of vision which almost scared him, so unreal did it appear—hovered before him.

"Margaret," he said, at last, "Margaret! do you really think that such an affection as you allude to—a devoted ardent attachment, sprung up unconsciously, unconsciously nursed, blended with every hour of a man's life, deepened by every trial, mingled with every emotion of his soul—a love, that as soon as he suspected it, he struggled with, despaired of overcoming, and then exalted into a devotion which knew no hope, and looked for no return—do you mean that it would not seem to you impossible, that strangely, suddenly, in an unexpected hour, that love should win back love at last?"

Margaret's tears were rolling slowly down her cheeks, but a smile was also on her lips, as she said, with her own peculiar tone of childish playfulness—

"Are you talking of Riddell now, Old Walter?" and she laid her hand on his.

He started, and said rapidly—

"Tell me, dearest Margaret, for mercy's sake tell me, do you understand me?—do I understand you, or have I been talking nonsense?—thinking aloud? it is all over now," he said with an effort, and then added, with a mournful smile, "I must have been dreaming, I think."

She pressed his hand, and one of those bright tears fell upon it.

"O Margaret, do not be sorry for me—if I have said too much, and that you have guessed the truth—do not be sorry for me; do not let a single thought of pain or of embarrassment disturb your gentle kindness, my precious Margaret, my own dear child! There are feelings which have their own reward, and if I do indeed love you, as never perhaps did any one love another before, this is hap-

piness in itself, and enough for me. That I have suffered I will not deny ; but I have now seen you calm and bright again, as if no cloud had ever darkened your peaceful life. I have seen you turn with courage and patience to all the home duties and sacred charities of life. I have seen that trial has purified without hardening your heart, and I am grateful, deeply grateful, Margaret, and full of hope for the future—for your future happiness—for your——”

He stopped, for Margaret's arms were round his neck, and she was telling him, in a voice that would have been scarcely audible to any ears but his—that she loved him better than any one in the world ; that she had sometimes thought so ; that she was sure of it now. His heart was beating so violently that he could scarcely utter, but he subdued his own agitation to calm hers. He took her hand between his, and led her to the window. The shades of evening had fallen, and a few stars were beginning to shine on the face of the darkening skies. The beautiful river, like a silver ribbon, was reflecting in its bosom the rays of the moon, and not a breath of air disturbed the silence of the scene. For an instant they were also silent, and then Walter spoke ; his voice belied the calmness of his manner : it was trembling with emotion.

“If I said just now, my Margaret, that in loving you I had had my share of earthly happiness, judge if this hour has not filled its measure. If no other joy was ever to be mine during the remainder of my life, than the memory of this, I could not complain. But listen to me, Margaret. From my soul, I thank you ! With my whole heart, I bless you ! I cannot love you more than I have done. It is not in man's power to love with more fervour, with more entire devotion ; but more, yet more than ever, my life, my fate, my existence, will be in your hands ; and to be to you all that father, brother, husband, in one, can be, in life, and till death, is my prayer, and I can scarcely believe it when I speak the word, it is now my *hope*. But, Margaret, listen to my firm, my unalterable resolution, formed even in this moment of overpowering happiness, and which, so help me God ! I will keep. You shall not marry your Old Walter—you shall not give your youth, your beauty, your heart to him—you shall not bind yourself by irrevocable ties, till you have tried and tested your own feelings, and learned the full value of that priceless gift. O my beloved child ! tell no one of the hope you have given me. Let not the world, or any human being, ever venture to interfere or judge, if the day should come when, with the same adorable

simplicity with which you have offered to intrust your happiness to my keeping, you should come to me and say—"Walter, I was mistaken. You *may*, you *must* love me still, but not in the way we once thought of." A silent pressure of the hand, a struggle, a prayer, and the dream would be at an end. This short life would be more sad, doubtless, and the thought of another more precious still than before; but none would know the trial, or the consolations of that hour, but yourself and me. Promise me this, Margaret!"

"And how long is my trial to last, you suspicious old Walter? I think I have done something very like proposing to you, and I am not quite sure I have not been refused in a very pretty sentimental manner."

Now, for the first time, Walter smiled, and the full tide of happiness seemed to rush over his heart.

"If in a year," he said; "if, after having spent several months in London, after having questioned your own heart—"

"O yes, I shall question it a great deal, and I know what it will answer; and if in a year's time I am in the same mind, you will consent to make me your wife? Is that it? I am very much obliged to you indeed, dear Walter, for the promise, though it is a new kind of thing that you should be the one to stipulate for delay. You must propose to me in form when the time comes, and perhaps kneel on one knee too, and write me some verses, and do all sorts of things of that kind. O Walter, why did we never think of this before?" she exclaimed, with a sort of childish impetuosity; and then checking herself, as she saw an intense emotion pass over his face, while in a low voice he repeated—"Never thought of it!"—she added, seriously, "I might have. If we had not opened our hearts to each other to-day, I might still have misunderstood my own feelings."

Long did they talk of the past—earnest was the confidence—intimate the communications of thought and feeling between them. The great clock of the castle struck ten before they turned from that window; and Margaret, with her bonnet and cloak on, rushed into the little drawing-room, where Mr. Sydney was asleep in his arm-chair, and Mrs. Sydney watching for every sound and step; she kissed the pale thin cheek of Walter's mother, and murmured in her ear—

"He will forgive you; don't be afraid."

When she reached home she found Ginevra in the library playing

some sacred music to her father. She glided gently into the room and placed herself near to her. The beautiful notes of Pergolese's "Stabat Mater" fell on her ear, and a ray of moonlight through the open window showed her her sister's face. It was in expression like what a painter would have assigned to the "Mother of Sorrows," and her thrilling voice seemed to reveal that she herself was "with sorrows heaviest weight oppressed," but supported under it by a more than human power. The sight of that meek suffering, of that calm desolation, affected Margaret more deeply than usual, from the contrast it afforded to the newly-acquired happiness which filled her own heart. But even then, perhaps, in the midst of suffering, and lonely suffering, there was a principle of strength and of consolation in the younger sister's heart, which was not fully understood by the other. That evening, at the same time, both had raised their eyes to heaven, and both had felt as if a blessing, a *benediction*, had descended on their heads. On one, the bright face of nature had smiled; its glorious hues, its perfumes, and its songs, had spoken a blessing from the skies, and that evening hour had brought her a promise of happiness, the purest that earth can yield. The other had received a benediction from the altar, where she had knelt in the immediate presence of God, and she rose with the promise that none but God can make good—that suffering itself may be a pledge of mercy, a source of blessing, an earnest of heaven.

Margaret drew near to the piano as her sister finished the plaintive but glorious strain, and passing her arm round her neck, whispered—

"Ginevra, I *am* happy; would to Heaven that you were so too!"

A flash of joy passed over the pale face of the youngest sister.

"O mother of mercies!" she exclaimed, "thou hast pleaded and obtained!"

She passed her arms round Margaret's waist, and looked up tenderly into her face, while she said in the lowest whisper—

"Walter?" Margaret stopped her mouth with a kiss, and hurried away.

A few days after, the whole family left Grantley for London, and it was settled between Walter and Margaret that he should follow them to town as soon as he had finished the arrangement of some affairs in the neighbourhood, in which his father was essentially concerned.

CHAPTER XIV.

Colonel Leslie's sister, Mrs. Wyndham, was a widow, and one of those persons whom most people like, without exactly being able to assign a reason, for she was rather too much engrossed with worldly amusements to suit the thoughtful in character, and the strict in principle. She was not wise or witty, or quiet enough to be an agreeable, or even wholly untroublesome member of society. She was not kind enough to put herself much out of the way for the sake of others, nor generous enough to render them very important services. But she was always in good spirits, always glad to see her friends, always ready to promote their pleasures. She had a pleasant laugh, an undisturbable good humour, an agreeable way of shaking hands, exceedingly comfortable arm-chairs, nice books with paper-cutters in them, on her tables, enough of luxury in her house for enjoyment, and not too much for show. She never said disagreeable things to people, nor of them to others, except to those to whom it happened at the moment to be peculiarly acceptable. She had not been often at Grantley, and of her brother had hardly ever seen anything since the days of their early youth. She was delighted, however, at the idea of his coming to town, and complained with rapture of the fatigue it would be to take out her two nieces. She told everybody that they were *coming out*, and that girls were so unmerciful at first in their exactions about sitting up at balls, that she expected to be quite knocked up before the end of the year. Maud Vincent, to whom she was holding forth on the subject, could scarcely repress a smile as she thought of the two sisters, and especially the pale Ginevra, being supposed to pine for a succession of London balls; but she, too, felt an intense impatience for their arrival. No subject had ever excited her curiosity so much as the state of feeling in that family, and she longed to observe the attitude of those two sisters in society.

She spoke of them to everybody she met; announced Margaret as an heiress, and Ginevra as a genius, and took every opportunity of hinting that the latter was a very extraordinary person, and that

women found it very difficult to get on with her. About the end of May the Leslies arrived, were established in London, and delivered up to Mrs. Wyndham's guardianship, who was enchanted at having pretty girls to take out, as the beggars rejoice in borrowing squalid children. If she could not have had them for nothing, she would gladly have hired them. None had ever answered to her before, as well as the Leslies, for they excited in London society what is described in the French newspapers when they speak of the Chamber of Deputies,—at first, *attention*, and then, *sensation*. They were both so pretty, and yet so very different, that the names of the Lily and the Rose were spontaneously bestowed upon them. Both were perfectly refined, and the most fastidious ear or taste could not have pointed out a gesture or a word that could have offended their nicest susceptibility; but at the same time, they were both in their different ways original, and as unlike the common type of girls, as a young mountain ash and an Indian palm would be in the midst of a plantation of pollard willows. The secret circumstances which accompanied the appearance of both in the world, contributed to this peculiarity. They were very young, and everything was new to them but the deep emotions of the heart. They had both had experience in suffering, though in different degrees; but in other ways they were as artless as children. Margaret was pleased with the world as she had been at seven years old with a toy shop. Sights, music, plays, dancing, admiration, homage, all seemed to her a brilliant show, in which she performed her part with the eagerness with which a child would fire off rockets, or ride in a turn-about; and the unceasing gaiety of the young heiress, and the courteous, merry, careless indifference with which she received all the adulation which she met with, strangely puzzled those that felt an interest in solving the problem. One man said to another—

“Do you think that little Leslie has a hard heart, or a cold heart, or a pre-engaged heart?”

“Perhaps she has no heart at all,” answered his friend, listlessly, while he spied at her as if she might be an anatomical curiosity.

It was very different with Ginevra. The world to her was no empty show, no mere pageant, through which she moved with happy and careless indifference. As in her own heart, she felt a deep and agitating principle at work under the calm and even surface, so in the visible world, under its listless joys, and its tame exterior, her observant eye and keen spirits discovered the strivings

of passion and the workings of the soul. She had not, like Margaret, lodged her heart in a place of safety, and from that secure resting-place glanced on the world as on a tournament, whose gay combatants rose and fell before her, without exciting anything but a smile; that world to her was the battle-field of life, the scene of a struggle on which her earthly happiness depended. There was not a woman who passed her in those crowded assemblies who might not one day be a rival, and court that love which was her right and her due. There was not a word uttered in those gay theatres, at those long dinners, in those dull morning visits, which did not make some secret anxiety swell, or some chord vibrate in her own breast. Often Edmund's name was uttered by some careless speaker—for he was rich, young, free, as they thought; and the good expressed hopes, and the worldly formed speculations, and the bad sneered, in the hearing of the trembling wife, whose colour rose and fell, and whose heart throbbed with violence during, what seemed to others, the most insignificant conversation. She was more beautiful than ever; and it was not only admiration that her presence called forth,—there were some whose feelings were roused to a degree that astonished themselves, by the strange fascination that Ginevra Leslie exercised. Cold and reserved in her manner, she gave no encouragement to those who addressed her in the language of love; but the varying colour in her cheek, the cloud of emotion which seemed to obscure the serene azure of her eyes, when any expression of the sort was uttered in her presence, excited and rivetted the interest she inspired. And cold as she was when made the object of direct attentions, there were moments when, through subjects of abstract discussion, her reserve seemed for an instant to give way, and the flashes of genius gave a momentary glimpse into the depths which that calm exterior habitually concealed. As she grew conscious of her own powers of captivation, and felt the influence which her beauty and her eloquence exercised on the crowd of admirers who surrounded her, she wondered in secret at the strangeness of her fate, and a painful smile, one of those smiles which, according to the character of the face over which they pass, are either bitterly scornful or inexpressibly mournful, flitted over her features, as she thought of the destiny which was forced upon her by one to whom she had given that love which others were so earnestly and so vainly striving to obtain. She became at once the idol of that world in which she had suddenly appeared. Her foreign appearance, joined to her

peculiar manners, and her still more peculiar talents, combined in exciting a general interest, and it was impossible that she should not feel the contrast between the homage she received, and the admiration she inspired, and the bitter and miserable destiny which her husband assigned to her; but the love and devotion of others, instead of healing, seemed but to deepen the wounds which her heart had received; and when bursts of admiration and murmurs of applause attended some brilliant exercise of her talents; when, with the enthusiasm of genius, and the simplicity of manner which belonged to her, she had electrified her hearers by some incomparable strain of melody, or by an improvisation, in which thought seemed to hurry on language with a startling and resistless impetuosity, she would return to her place, and sit in silence with one image before her eyes, and only value the praises resounding in her ears, as tributes to be one day laid at the feet of her undeserving husband.

The more Margaret's attention was directed to her sister, the more earnestly she watched her manners and her conduct, the more confirmed she felt in her conviction that there was something very extraordinary in her history. She never could detect the slightest indication in her manner, of anything that would have justified Maud's impression of her character, or that would have tallied with the glaring impropriety of conduct which she had herself detected on that memorable morning at Grantley; and it was with almost as much emotion as Ginevra, that she heard, in casual conversation, that Edmund Neville was expected in town, in the course of the following week. The weather was become intensely hot, and London was crowded to excess. Both sisters were fatigued with the exertions of the last few days, and Margaret was annoyed at the delay in Walter's arrival. He wrote that he was still delayed in the country by business; but in her secret heart she thought that this prolonged absence betokened a too confident security, and she said to herself, that, after all, he ought not to be quite so "*sûr de son fait*," and leave her for so many weeks, without looking after her proceedings. She might have fallen in love with ever so many people, who had been making up to her; and when she received another letter again indefinitely putting off his arrival, it just occurred to her, that, perhaps, she would flirt a little, very little, but just enough to vent the irritation which this intelligence had produced.

There was to be that evening a party at Mrs. Wyndham's, to

which her nieces had promised to come early; her house looked on Hyde Park, and the windows were all thrown open to catch the faint breezes which now and then stirred the muslin curtains, among which vases of flowers and coloured lamps were arranged. There were very few people arrived when Colonel Leslie and his daughters entered the room; but Margaret's rapid glance soon discerned a young man whose face was familiar to her, from having repeatedly met him, during the last few weeks, without having as yet ascertained his name. He was in deep mourning, and his grave and mild countenance had somewhat arrested her attention. He seemed to take very little part in society, and yet they had scarcely been to a single ball or party without seeing him, and especially remarked how frequently his eyes were fixed on Ginevra. She had come to the conclusion that he must be a timid admirer of her sister's, and it rather amused her to watch this kind of mute devotion, on the part of the silent young man. She wished to ask Mrs. Wyndham what his name was, but as she was busy receiving her guests, she could not obtain her attention, and both sisters sat down together on a couch opposite to the window. Sir Charles d'Arcy (one of the young men who had spent some days at Grantley in the winter) left the balcony, and placed himself on a chair, next to the sofa. He nodded to the silent young man, who looked up from a book of prints he was examining, and nodded also with a good-humoured smile. By degrees he took part in the conversation that was going on between the sisters and Sir Charles, and Margaret observed that he seemed particularly anxious to catch every word that fell from Ginevra's lips. After some insignificant remarks, Sir Charles said to the stranger.

"Have you heard from Anne, lately?"

"Yes," he answered: "I believe she will be in town in a few days."

"To meet Edmund, I suppose, then."

Margaret looked at her sister, and so did the stranger, and all three coloured deeply.

"He has been at Paris all this time—has not he?" again asked Sir Charles.

"Yes," said the unknown, with his eyes still fixed upon Ginevra: "spending a great deal of money, I am told, and leading a very gay life."

"Any matrimonial project *en l'air*?"

"There have been reports of the kind, I believe; but," he added, after a pause, "I do not believe them to be true."

"Who do they name?" said Ginevra, in so low a voice that no one heard her. "Who do they speak of?" she repeated, in so loud a tone that this time the question startled her neighbour.

"O! Mrs. Fraser, the beautiful widow that people talk of so much."

"Would Miss Neville approve?" inquired Sir Charles d'Arcy.

"I don't know," answered the unknown, without this time raising his eyes from his book.

Mrs. Wyndham at that moment joined them, and said carelessly,

"O, are you speaking of that tiresome Edmund Neville? He has just written to put off his coming again, and it quite spoils a little plan of mine, for I had reckoned upon him."

"What is that?" said another young man.

"Our Play," said Mrs. Wyndham; "I want him to act. You know it is for a charity, and that every one ought to help us who can."

"Does he act well?" asked Sir Charles.

"O, yes!" Margaret said; and then added, as if to herself, "and more parts than one."

The silent young man bent his head down over the book, and said, in so low a voice that she only heard, and only just heard it,

"Have you any reasons for saying so?"

Margaret's eyes met his, and both again coloured deeply. He rose immediately, and she proposed to Ginevra to move into the next room. As they passed Lucy Vincent, who was sitting at the tea table, Margaret stopped and asked her who was the young man who was standing in the doorway, speaking to Sir Charles d'Arcy.

"O, that is Mr. Charles Neville; he is a cousin of your friend Mr. Neville, and engaged to marry his sister, I believe. Don't you know him?"

Margaret felt her sister's arm tremble within hers, and both moved into the balcony, where the air was cooler, and the lights less glaring. They sat there alone for a few minutes.

Margaret's thoughts wandered to the terrace of Heron Castle, to the flower garden of Grantley, to the old library where Walter sat and read while she played to him; she thought of his love and of his kindness, and smiled to herself as she remembered the revenge she had planned—how fatiguing it would be to flirt with others—how

soothing it was to think of him. Meanwhile, where were Ginevra's thoughts during that instant of silence? Her lips were tightly drawn together, and tears were gathering in her eyes. Her heart was sick with hope deferred—it was sore with a new anxiety—it felt too bruised to meet a coming struggle. She laid her forehead one moment on her sister's shoulder, as if to rest her aching brow. The rustling of a curtain behind them startled her, and turning round she saw Charles Neville standing close to her. He sat down on a chair by her side, and said, in a kind manner,

"I am afraid you are very tired, Miss Leslie."

She nodded assent, and said,

"Have you seen the Warrens lately?"

"No; are they in town?"

"Not that I know of."

"They are great friends of yours, are they not?"

"They have been very kind to me. I have a great regard for Mr. Warren."

"Have you been long in England?" she inquired, feeling a strange pleasure in speaking to a near relation of Edmund's, and of hearing names of people and places which were connected with him.

"Yes; I left Clantoy about six weeks ago. It was hard to leave it in all its spring beauty. It is such a lovely place. You have heard the Warrens speak of it, I suppose?"

"I have often heard of it," she replied.

"You know Edmund Neville, don't you?" said her companion, with some embarrassment.

She had never been asked that question before, and it produced a strange impression upon her.

"Yes; I know him," she slowly answered; and the crimson colour rose in her cheek as she spoke.

"He is at Paris, you know?"

This had been said before her already, and Charles Neville was aware of it. Why did he repeat it now? She darted upon him a quick glance of inquiry, which he met by a piercing gaze, which intended to read into her thoughts, felt as if the very expression of her eyes, the hurried sigh that escaped her, might ruin Edmund. Faint and giddy, she snatched a glass of water from a passing tray, and then, in as indifferent a tone as she could command, inquired,

"When was it you said that Mr. Neville was expected in town?"

"His sister hopes to meet him next week, but it seems uncertain, from Mrs. Wyndham's account, whether his arrival will not be again postponed. Miss Neville," he added with hesitation, "will be anxious to make your acquaintance—she has heard so much of you from—"

He paused, and Ginevra fixed upon him her eyes with an almost expression of surprise and of fear, and he added hastily,

"From the Warrens, you know." He then talked of other things, and soon after walked away.

Ginevra turned to Margaret to propose returning home, but saw that she was engaged in an animated conversation with Frederick Vincent; all appearance of listlessness and fatigue had disappeared from her countenance, but, as they talked, her manner grew more earnest, and her expression more thoughtful. She seemed annoyed when Colonel Leslie made a sign from the door that he wished to go; and while they were putting on their cloaks in the hall, Ginevra heard her sister say, in a low voice, to Frederick Vincent,

"When shall you come back?"

"On the night of the play," he said, "and in the meantime speak to Lucy; she knows all about it."

As they passed before his two sisters she saw that Maud looked significantly at her brother and at Margaret, and said something in a low voice to Lucy. Ginevra thought of Walter, and a painful fear crossed her mind as she stepped into the carriage; Margaret heard the deep sigh that escaped her, and looked anxiously into her face.

"What is it, Ginevra?" she whispered, struck with her more than usual paleness.

"Nothing, dearest," she answered faintly.

"Ah, never anything else," retorted Margaret impatiently—" *On se brise contre cette glace*"—and leaning back in the corner she closed her eyes, and did not speak again that night.

During the next ten days both sisters appeared equally restless, and equally reserved in conversation; at the same time each felt, and in her manner evinced, an anxious solicitude about the other. Each day that passed without bringing any intelligence of Edmund's arrival, heightened Ginevra's disquietude to such a degree, that she could only preserve her calmness by efforts that nothing would have enabled her to make but an early acquired and long continued habit of self-command. Her courage never threatened to give way, except when she anticipated a state of things that would obscure the view she took of her line of duty, and now this danger seemed im-

pending. Sometimes she asked herself if she ought not at once to break the silence which her husband had imposed upon her, open her heart, and reveal her history to her father, and brave all the consequences of such a step ; but the fear of driving Edmund to despair, of banishing him for ever from England and from herself, compelled her to pause, and at least to see him once again, and by all the might and all the power which the justice of her cause, and the fervency of her love could give, to lead, to force him, into the paths of truth and honour. In the meantime she felt frightened at the pertinacity with which Charles Neville sought her acquaintance, and followed her steps ; and to avoid this scrutiny often turned from him abruptly, and then again sought his presence, with the hope that he might let fall a word about Edmund which would confirm or dispel her harassing doubts. She was also anxious about Margaret, who seemed unusually absorbed and pre-occupied, and spent a great deal of time with the Vincents. She eagerly looked for Walter's arrival, and felt doubly anxious when a letter from Grantley at last accounted for his prolonged absence. A severe illness had confined him to his bed for several weeks, and he had purposely enjoined his family, and the Thorntons, to refrain from mentioning it in their letters to London, as he wished (so he expressed it to them) that Margaret's enjoyments should not be interfered with by the knowledge of his sufferings. He secretly resigned himself to this absence, from the conviction that her feelings would not be fairly tried if he was present to watch her movements, and by his presence maintain a constant appeal to an affection, the existence of which, whatever might be its nature, he could not doubt. He was resigned, but resignation is not happiness, and if Walter never indulged an impatient thought, or uttered any but kind words during that long illness and that slow recovery ; if he smiled cheerfully when his mother tried to amuse him, and answered his father's rough raillery, or Mrs. Thornton's explanations of the exact nature of Margaret's character, and of the utter indifference, which by this time she must have attained to, and about all her friends at Grantley, it was a proof that, in the charity which beareth all things and is kind, he was a greater proficient than most people. Margaret's earnest expressions of feeling, the tears that started to her eyes as she received this account, and communicated it to Ginevra, dispelled some vague fears which the latter had conceived, and both talked of Walter, as they drove through the parks that afternoon, with an interest and a tenderness

which would have done more good to his aching head, and stilled the rapid beating of his feverish pulse, as he lay on his couch, near the window, at Heron Castle, than all the Eau-de-Cologne and saline draughts which his mother thrust upon him, or even than the globules which Mrs. Thornton occasionally produced with a tiny spoon out of a tiny bottle.

"We shall stay at home, Ginevra, to-night, shall we not?" said Margaret. "We will not go to that tiresome party at Lady Tyrrell's. I shall like one quiet evening so much. I have never time in the day to write a really long letter to dear Walter, and I have thousand things to tell him.—You do not want to go, do you?"

"No, dearest; while you write to Walter, I will finish altering that last scene in the translation of '*Simple Histoire*,' which Mrs. Wyndham disliked. By inserting some of the beauties of the novel itself, into this translation of the French drama, it can be greatly improved. They have been rehearsing the first acts, and are impatient for the conclusion."

As Ginevra was finishing this sentence, they were passing through Grosvenor-gate into Parklane. Margaret, who was reclining in the carriage, with her bonnet very much blown back by the soft west wind, and looking vacantly before her, started as she passed Grosvenor-street, and made a kind of exclamation. Her sister looked down the street, and saw Frederic Vincent, with several other young men, riding towards the Park.

"I thought Mr. Vincent was only to come back on the night of the play," Ginevra said, as they passed him; and Margaret answered, with a look of absent pre-occupation,

"I thought so too." She did not say another word till they reached home.

As they stood in the drawing-room, where a servant was arranging in a *jardinière*, some flowers which they had bought at a nursery-garden, Ginevra, said—

"Had you not better write immediately to Mrs. Wyndham, to say that we do not mean to go to Lady Tyrrell's to-night?"

Margaret appeared not to hear at first, and made a rose-tree change places with an azalea, greatly to the damage of her straw-coloured gloves.

"Shall I write?" said Ginevra again.

"O, no! thank you," and Margaret slipped into the sofa behind the writing table, took a pen, bit the very tip of its last feather,

and then, as her sister was leaving the room, called her back, and said—

“On second thoughts, I think I shall go to Lady Tyrrell’s. What will you do?”

“Would you like me to go?”

“Not if you had rather stay at home.”

“Then I think I will,” said Ginevra, and went up to her room.

She felt depressed and anxious on Margaret’s account. For a short time she had deemed her happiness secure, and now it seemed to her that a fresh cloud; slight, indeed, as the first that rises in a summer sky, hung over a future which had seemed so serene. Colonel Leslie dined out that day, and the two sisters were again alone after dinner, and, drawing a table near the window to profit by the remaining light, and opening it wide to catch the scanty coolness of a London summer evening, they both placed before them, one her writing paper, and the other the manuscript on which she was employed. But both pens were idle, both young faces were serious. Margaret seemed absorbed in her thoughts, now and then writing a few lines, and then gazing at the lamp-lighter, as he swiftly moved from post to post, as if she felt the deepest interest in his occupation. Ginevra was writing with more perseverance, but occasionally glanced at her sister. Their eyes met, and then Margaret smiled gaily, and said—

“How is Miss Milner getting on?”

“I was not thinking of Miss Milner, I was thinking of——”

“Who?” asked Margaret, in the same tone.

“Miss Leslie,” said Ginevra, with a sweet but rather melancholy smile.

“What about her?”

“That I wished, oh! how I wish that she had a sister older than herself, a sister in whom she could have confidence, whose advice she would not justly mistrust—whose own heart might open itself to her, and thus gain a right to ask for an insight into hers. One,” Ginevra continued, with increased emotion, “who had not lost all right to warn others, except through that single claim which she possesses, Margaret, which she indeed possesses—experience in suffering.”

Tears rushed into Ginevra’s eyes as she said this. Margaret grew red, and looked at the paper before her without speaking.

“You must think it very presumptuous of me to speak to you even in this way, Margaret; you have been to me all tenderness,

‘and friend to more than human friendship just.’ There has been no harshness in your words, no scorn in your eyes, and, from my soul, I feel the value of that forbearance; and, oh! my sister, my dearest sister! by all I have suffered, by all I suffer every day, by all I endure and dare not speak of, listen to me, and think of what I say, before you deviate by one line from the path of truth and openness—before you complicate your duties and blind your own eyes that they may not enlighten your own heart.”

“It would be a great advantage for us all,” answered Margaret, in a half-discontented, half-consequential manner, “if we spoke the truth to one another. But as it seems that *that* is impossible, we must do the best we can, each in our own way.”

An expression of disappointment passed over Ginevra’s face, and she took her pen again with that silent resignation which always touched Margaret. She looked at her with tenderness, then bit her lips and gazed at the ceiling; then wrote with rapidity another page of her letter; a smile played on her lips, then she grew grave again, and placing the letter on Ginevra’s manuscript, said—

“Read that.”

These were the lines she pointed to with her finger.

“And if you ask me, dearest Walter, what I have seen most beautiful in London, I must answer, Ginevra! If you ask me what I have seen most extraordinary, I must answer, Ginevra. What most inexplicable, *her* character. What most singular, *her* position in her family and in the world. Inspiring an irresistible sympathy, and repelling its approach; attracting confidence, and never yielding it in return; capable of every sacrifice; ambitious of every virtue; and yet resigned to a life without object and without interest. Dearer to me every day that we live, yet more and more estranged from me, with sorrows which none but herself can know, with joys, if she has any, with which she allows none to intermeddle. I feel tempted every hour to exclaim, ‘Who is not a stranger to her?’— ‘Would to Heaven I knew her better, or loved her less!’”

Deeply Ginevra coloured as she read this letter; and then, to Margaret’s surprise, she tore it in pieces. This action was so unlike her usual manner, that she looked at her with inexpressible surprise.

“Margaret,” she said, with agitation, “you cannot speak of me in this manner, for you know more than in this letter you would

appear to know. You cannot complain of my reserve, when in an hour," her voiced trembled as she spoke, "a dreadful hour to us both, you had a glimpse of my history, and suspected," she hid her face in her hands, "the—"

"The truth. Oh, for heaven's sake! my sister—my Ginevra—what is the truth? I can bear this silence no longer. It is a torment of every day—of every hour. Speak to me, I implore you!"

Ginevra, like all gentle people, when deeply agitated, grew almost violent in manner, under the influence of strong emotion.

"Margaret, I have told you this cannot be. This must not be. I have told you that my own weakness—that the faults of—that my faults have complicated all my duties, and gone far towards bewildering my mind; but I still know right from wrong, and the silence you reproach me with, is a sacred duty, which you must help, not thwart, me in accomplishing."

"I have never seen you thus moved," said Margaret. "Forgive me, Ginevra."

"Forgive you! Oh! Margaret, Margaret! would that I had nobody to forgive but you! Let me hold your hand on my head, for its coolness does me good. I have struggled so much; I am better now, thank you, dearest."

At that moment a loud knock at the door announced Mrs. Wyndham's carriage. Margaret rose hastily from her knees, on which she had sunk by her sister's side, kissed her cheek, and hurried down stairs, murmuring to herself—"This shall not last, no, not if I have to move heaven and earth to find out the truth." She jumped into the carriage, and found Mrs. Wyndham in an uneasy state of mind about her play; her *Prima Donna* was in bed with a bad cold, which had some appearance of measles, and she was in the greatest perturbation on the subject. Margaret, as she arrived at the party, hastily glanced round the room, and seeing Lucy Vincent on a sofa near the chimney, immediately went up to her. After a while, Frederic Vincent joined them, and talked to her in a low voice during the remainder of the evening.

CHAPTER XV.

The next two days brought matters to a crisis about Mrs. Wyndham's theatricals. Her *prima donna* was fairly laid up with the measles, and the unfortunate manager, with the note which conveyed the melancholy intelligence in one hand, and the translated and corrected manuscript in the other, looked at her disconsolate troop with a helpless expression of distress, which drew a smile even from the most zealous amateurs. Every impossible mode of supplying the vacancy was successively suggested and rejected. The play *must* take place, for the little theatre in—street had been engaged; and if it failed, instead of gaining money for distressed weavers, which had been the purpose in view, there would be a pecuniary loss, which could not be for an instant contemplated. Rather than give up the play Mrs. Wyndham would act herself: this suggestion made the actors' hearts quail with apprehension, especially that of Sir Charles d'Arcy, who was to enact Lord Elmwood, and who pictured to himself the fatal vivacity with which Miss Milner would frolic about him, in the event of their kind manager undertaking the part herself. An embarrassing silence followed the suggestion, and then Mrs. Wyndham exclaimed,

"If Ginevra would but act, it would be perfect."

A murmur of approbation rose, and everybody said, "She must!"

"She would not hear of it when it was first proposed," Mrs. Windham remarked.

"O, but now that it will be a real kindness to do so," one actor replied.

"And that the whole thing would fail if she refused," said another.

"And that it is for such a great charity,"

"And that the theatre is already engaged."

"And that everybody knows that she can if she will."

The spirits of the troop revived. It would have been too dreadful

to give it all up; and by the rapid transition of mind, that jumps from hope to security, it was considered *certain* that Ginevra would consent, and twelve o'clock the following day was fixed upon for the next rehearsal,—Mrs. Wyndham pledging herself to produce her niece, “or a substitute,” she added, which conclusion somewhat damped again the exultation of the departing amateurs.

Perhaps Mrs. Wyndham could not have arrived at her brother's house at a more favourable moment, for the success of her project, than the one she accidentally hit upon. She found him alone, and having explained fully her plans—her charitable intentions—her disappointment—her difficulties and her hopes—she obtained from him, not only a consent that his daughter should take a share in the performance, but he even expressed a wish that she should do so, if it was not disagreeable to herself. Colonel Leslie's adoration of Ginevra was such, that to see her, to watch her, and to see others carried away and transported by their admiration of her talents, was the most intense enjoyment he was capable of. *Blasé* and indifferent himself to all species of amusement or success, the enthusiasm which had lain deep in his character, and which had for awhile burst out in his youth and then been forced back into silence by the influence of an unchastened grief, had centered on his youngest daughter, the living image, the fair reflection of past days of happiness, in which all the powers of his mind—the pleasures of imagination, as well as the emotions of the heart,—had been called into play. Her strange beauty, her stranger charm, her peculiar genius, stirred his soul, and revived his enthusiasm. He did not wonder as others did at her gravity—at the shade of sadness which hung about her. In his presence it melted into tenderness, and harmonised with his feelings; but he sometimes felt anxious about her. He fancied the climate of England, and the absence of excitement—that excitement, which the very air of Italy carries to the soul—which seems to reach it through every sight, through every sound—through which idleness itself is intellectual, and solitude animated, must oppress her spirits and affect her health. He watched her pale cheek grow paler every day, and thought her life wanted interest and variety. Strange, how we live, often day by day, hour by hour, by the side of those we love best, who love us most, and never guess the secret influence which act on their souls, the secrets of the hidden life carried on within the folds of that outward existence, which, after all, is but the coarse shell of our real and immortal being. It is not strange that in such a case we should

make mistakes in our dealings with others, and that sometimes, in roughly handling the shell, we bruise the pearl within. Colonel Leslie rejoiced at an opportunity of rousing Ginevra's spirits, and animating her to exertion, and he warmly urged her to accede to his sister's request. She resisted, and with more energy and decision than she usually evinced on questions of this sort; and it was with a heightened colour that she expressed her reluctance and distaste for the public appearance which she was requested to make. Mrs. Wyndham's perseverance annoyed her, and she peremptorily refused.

"Well, then!" Mrs. Wyndham ejaculated, "I see how it will be. We must put off the play, and ask Mrs. Fraser, as soon as she arrives, to take that part, and then, no doubt, we shall easily get Edmund Neville to act Lord Frederic Lawnley."

Ginevra changed colour, and stammered a few unintelligible words, which instantly conveyed to Mrs. Wyndham's mind the impression that her resolution was not irrevocable, and with a woman's quickness, (this time justifiably at fault), she traced this hesitation to a reluctance on her part, to lose an opportunity of displaying her talents, especially when her place was likely to be supplied by a person of whose beauty and cleverness so much had been said. Rather amused at this supposed little feminine weakness, she did not immediately take the hint, and went on descanting on Mrs. Fraser's charms—the irresistible fascination of her countenance, her smiles, and her brilliant repartees—little aware of the nature of the pain she was inflicting, or that the contracted brow and quivering lip, with which those comments were received, were the indications, not of a wounded and anxious vanity, but of feelings that were tried in that moment almost beyond endurance. Thoughts of vanity were so far removed from Ginevra's mind, that it did not occur to her to suppose that others would attribute them to her (nor would she have cared if they had), and it was from a sudden impulse that she announced that her mind was changed, and that she would act if it was desired. Mrs. Wyndham gladly accepted, Colonel Leslie expressed great pleasure at her intention, and the whole thing was arranged before Ginevra had well considered what she had pledged herself to. It did not belong to her character to attach much conventional importance to any circumstance of the kind. To prevent a closer association between Edmund and Mrs. Fraser than the usual forms of society afford, was the only prominent idea in her mind when she undertook the task,

and to perform it to the best of her ability, in justice to those who had intrusted it to her, was her only care in connexion with it. Her whole soul was possessed with one feeling, which grew every day more intense—her ardent desire for Edmund's return to England; she felt as if to see him once more would relieve the heavy load of anxiety that was weighing upon her mind. If she could but once meet his eyes again, she would read in their expression whether she still was beloved; she would know the real nature of the barrier which had so fatally risen between them, and exchange, at least, one species of misery for another—as great, perhaps, but less tormenting than suspense.

Margaret agreed to take some trifling part in the piece that was to follow the "Simple Story," and day after day both sisters went to rehearse at Mrs. Wyndham's. Ginevra's acting disappointed the expectations which had been raised on the subject. Nothing could be more graceful than her movements, more musical than her intonations, or more intelligent than the conception of her part, but to those who had heard her recite or sing, there appeared in her acting a great want of the fire and sensibility which on those other occasions had been so remarkable. An involuntary languor seemed to hang over her actions, and when she had spoken the sentence allotted to her, she often appeared abstracted and indifferent to the whole affair. Her sweetness of temper never varied, or her obliging readiness to satisfy others; she never disputed any point, and revised and altered her translation of Scribe's drama, as often as a suggestion was made to her on the subject. Once, during a rehearsal, when she was leaning silently against one of the pillars, while a scene which she did not appear in was going on, and gazing listlessly on one of the painted scenes, whose rough delineations of temples, statues, and villa gardens, caused her thoughts to wander back to Verona, to the Casa Masani, and to the days of her youth, (for though she was not yet nineteen, there is a kind of youthfulness which sorrow blights far more effectually than time, and her's had withered at an early age) her attention was roused by the arrival of Mrs. Wyndham, on whose arm was leaning a woman very smartly dressed, and whose appearance was on the whole rather pleasing; she was tall and slim, had very large eyes, with an expression, which, while it approached as nearly to a squint as is consistent with beauty, added something peculiar and wild to her countenance. Her mouth was large, and her teeth fine, and in the whole manner and attitude of this new comer, there was an *étourderie* and a grace,

an impertinent civility, and a reckless, but no unfeminine audacity, which made a great contrast with her friend Mrs. Wyndham's serious frivolity, and earnest worldliness. Ginevra guessed who she was, at once, and her heart beat very fast when her aunt presented to her Mrs. Fraser. She bowed coldly, and at that moment was called upon to rehearse the next scene, while Mrs. Wyndham and her new friend stood on the stage, and whispered loud enough for a few words now and then to reach her ears. The name of Neville was twice pronounced, and then Mrs. Fraser said in a very low voice, "A perfect *Héros de Roman*." The scene that Ginevra was rehearsing was one of the gayest in the whole piece, and this time she acted as ill as possible; and Mrs. Fraser, who had taken up her spying-glass, and in the intervals of her conversation with her neighbour examined her with a sort of careless indifference, shrugged her shoulders, and whispered loud enough for Ginevra to hear, "*Elle ne s'y entend guère*." Mrs. Wyndham then looked at her attentively, and was struck with the painful and careworn expression of her face, and it suddenly occurred to her that it would be an advantage to the performance, and, as she imagined, a relief to her niece, if she was to yield her part to Mrs. Fraser, who was evidently dying to act, and very much disappointed at having lost the opportunity. In a whisper she conveyed this idea to the latter, who shook her head, but looked delighted, and in the first pause that occurred, Mrs. Wyndham took Ginevra's hand in her's, and finding it cold and trembling, she said in a half playful, half serious manner—

"We have treated you very ill, dear love, in teasing you into this. I am sure it is too much for your strength, and will make you quite ill at last. I dare say Mrs. Fraser would take the part even now, if you wished it."

"You must get me another Lord Frederick in that case," interrupted Mrs. Fraser, with a significant glance at the respectable and shy young man who was enacting the reckless hero of the piece, and who every day petitioned to be let off.

"I know whom you would have," said Mrs. Windham, "but he is not here."

"He would come if I insisted upon it," Mrs. Fraser negligently replied, while she played with her fan. "Shall I write to him?"

This was too much. Ginevra looked up, and the blood rushed to her face; flashes of light seemed to dart from those pale blue orbs which a moment before appeared so languid and heavy.

Mrs. Fraser put out her hand for the manuscript which Ginevra held, and exclaimed—

“O, I could learn it in a minute, and rehearse to-morrow, and by next Monday our *jeune premier* will be arrived.”

Ginevra looked her full in the face, grasped the sheet of paper, as if she would rather have died than let it go, and said in Italian, and with a violence that amazed all the bystanders—

“I will not have my part taken from me.”

Mrs. Fraser pressed the tip of her tongue against her slightly closed teeth, and made a curtesy, which, by its graceful, profound, and sweeping magnitude, seemed calculated to afford a refuge in all the embarrassing positions in life, and retreated a few steps while she glanced her eye over the detached sentences of the manuscript. Her wish to act increased three-fold as she perceived how much scope for the display of that kind of talent this play afforded, and she felt to the greatest degree provoked that this pale girl, who seemed scarcely able to articulate, should persist in retaining a part which would have so peculiarly suited herself. Mrs. Wyndham was also annoyed, though she did not venture, after all her previous solicitations, to urge Ginevra on the subject; but she expressed great fears to her brother that the exertion would be too great for her; he anxiously questioned her about it, but though she persisted in denying it, and tenaciously persevered in her determination to act, he could not but observe that she was looking very ill, and that the usual gravity of her countenance had a shade of deeper sadness in it than usual. If Mrs. Fraser in the midst of her provocation, or Colonel Leslie in the midst of his solicitude, could have read into that young heart during those days of silent suffering, they would both have started and wondered that aught so young could be so sad. When after that rehearsal scene she found herself alone, she two or three times waved her arms above her head, as if to dissipate the weight that seemed to press on her brain, and then clasped her hands in earnest supplication.

“Send an angel to comfort me,” she murmured; and doubtless her prayer was heard, for tears came to her relief—tears that fall like rain on the parched ground; and words too, which relieve the pent up spirit, burst from her lips in the solitude of her chamber—broken, incoherent, checked by sobs, without precise meaning—but yet with power to relieve. Who knows not the value of those secret out-pourings?

“Edmund, will you come to me? Edmund, will you return to

me?" she murmured. "I am so weary, so lonely, so frightened sometimes. I am so afraid of you—I am so afraid for you. O, if I dared, I would flee away, and be at rest. There are homes where I might lay my head, and never cross your path again. But I may not shrink from the struggle. Oh, that woman! Anything but that—any trial but that. Bound to me for ever—bound to me by ties he hates, perhaps, and cannot break—and my silence, my ignorance, my fears—it is too much—the cross is too heavy, the burthen too great!"

She lifted up her head: the sun was sinking obscurely bright among the dark clouds that seemed assembled to receive him. It was the sunset-hour, when every knee bends in her own land as the vesper-bell floats over sea and plain from every lofty spire and convent tower. She recited the sacred but familiar words, and with them peace returned. Long and earnestly she prayed. She prayed for strength to do her duty, that simplest and most sublime of all prayers, whether it points to the commonest self-denials, or to the most heroic sacrifices. He that hears that prayer, and gives that strength, knows alone where it is most needed,—for He alone can judge of the merit of those sacrifices to which the world so often renders much more or much less than justice. Pale still, but patient and calm, Ginevra left her room, and joined her father and her sister. With that perfect simplicity and earnestness of character which was peculiar to her, she reproached herself for having neglected to do her best at the rehearsal of that morning,—at having allowed her own sufferings to interfere with the satisfaction of others—and it would have been touching to any one who could have known how sore and bruised that gentle spirit had been that day, to have seen her take up that manuscript, the very sight of which was painful to her, and con it over like a child its lesson, while now and then she disentangled Margaret's knitting, or raised her eyes from her work to smile at Colonel Leslie, who since the morning had watched her with anxious tenderness. She observed this, and it gave her a motive for exertion. She went out early the next morning, and ascertained from a priest, whose chapel she was in the habit of visiting, that the vessel which was to bring Father Francesco to England was expected to sail from New York in the course of a few weeks. This welcome intelligence revived her courage, and she returned to her enforced gaieties, her harassing suspense, and her perplexing task, with spirits refreshed and energies renewed,

CHAPTER XVI.

Two or three days before the one that was appointed for the representation in favour of the Spital-fields weavers, Walter Sydney arrived in London, and made his appearance one morning at breakfast in the little drawing-room of Colonel Leslie's house. Margaret gave a start when he entered the room, and a look of sincere pleasure spread over her face as she welcomed him. There was, however, in her countenance and in her manner something anxious and restless, which did not escape his notice. He attributed it to excitement and fatigue, and merely sighed for the time when they should all return to the country, and leave behind them dust and balls, smoke and private theatricals, all of which seemed equally repugnant to his tastes. He was the most perfect town-hater in the world. The smells, the sights, the sounds, were positively painful to him. His eyes smarted, his limbs ached, his feet swelled under the influence of the smoky atmosphere, of the smooth hot pavement, of the pale sun by day, and the bright gas-lights by night. All the varieties of deformity and of misery which haunt you on every side as you pace along the streets, affected him painfully; and the contrast at every moment exhibited between the extremity of abject suffering on the one hand, and the height of pomp and luxury on the other, irritated him into a state of pugnaciousness which he seldom experienced in the country. He really hated London as other people hate an enemy; and he very nearly quarrelled with Ginevra, who maintained that a great city has a poetry of its own, which makes its way to the heart of those who are alive to its influences, and that this dark, foggy, smoky, gloomy, busy London, lays a strong hold on the imagination of those whose minds keep silent watches, in the midst of that wild maze of thought and of action which carries them along with its powerful tide.

"Elsewhere we carry on life : in London life carries us on," she said with a jaded look, as if she was willing to roll swiftly down

that silent but ceaseless stream, which is called Life. Walter looked at her, and only said—

“Whither?”

“Aye,” she replied hastily, “nothing signifies but that. The current is swift, but the end is sure.”

“And you are going to act to-night?” he said, absently, as if musing on the strange contrast between her state of mind and her present pursuits.

“All life is acting,” she replied quickly, and her lip quivered.

“Hush!” she said, as he was about to answer—“do not speak to me, dear Mr. Sydney. I have need to be calm, and I am calm, but not enough to analyse the nature of my own feelings, or to discuss them with you. I am so glad you are come, for Margaret’s sake.”

Walter looked at Margaret, who was reading a letter which had been placed in her hand a moment before. She seemed much interested in its contents, and he had to speak to her twice before she answered him. At last she looked up, and as he was proposing to her a walk, she told him that she was engaged to be with the Vincents at twelve o’clock, to practice some duets with them, and begged him to escort her to their house. He assented, and they proceeded along the park towards Piccadilly. Her bag fell from her arm, and as the letter she had just received escaped from it, Walter’s eyes rested accidentally on the signature, which he saw was Frederick Vincent.

“May I read this letter?” he said, with a smile.

“No, Walter, not yet,” she replied in a serious manner. “I may have to speak to you, in a few days, on a subject connected with that letter: it is one of great importance to us all, but I would rather not enter upon it at present.”

A sudden paleness spread over Walter’s face, but he did not say a word, and she spoke of something else, and thus they crossed the sun-burnt, hot, and dusty grass towards Hyde-Park-corner. Now and then, she pressed his arm kindly, and said—

“Dear Walter, it is such a comfort to have you here” or, “I am so glad you are come at last;” but his silence embarrassed her, and neither of them felt at ease with the other. At last, as they drew near to Lord Donnington’s house, Margaret said, in a hesitating manner—

“Are you coming in?”

"No!" he answered abruptly. "Ginevra fetches you away in the carriage, you know."

The door opened.

"When shall I see you again?" Margaret said, in a low voice.

He was gone without having heard her question, and wandered into Kensington Gardens with a mind ill at ease, and greater difficulty in looking the future in the face than he had ever yet experienced. Ever since his conditional engagement with Margaret, he had struggled with himself and endeavoured to keep his mind prepared for the alternative which he himself had insisted on leaving to her. He had told himself, that he was prepared for the result;—but who is ever prepared for affliction?—to whom does it not teach a new lesson?—to whom does it not reveal new secrets? Walter had often said to himself, when Edmund Neville was preferred by Margaret, that his own sufferings were the result of doubts as to Edmund's character which made him tremble for her happiness. This was true to a certain degree, and, perhaps, if at that time she had transferred her affections to Frederic Vincent, he might have mistaken the comparative relief which this would have produced for contentment; but now the cup of bliss had been held to his lips—the future had passed before him with all its visions of love and happiness, and to forego it all at once and for ever, without a right to complain, without the relief of reproach or a murmur, was a task which even the most exalted heroism of affection writhed under, though it did not shrink from it. He sat on one of those old wooden benches, left for a moment vacant by the tribes of nurses and children that were strolling about, and pictured to himself his next interview with Margaret, and the necessity there would be to appear resigned, contented, calm—to listen to her communication, aye, to encourage her to make it, to reassure her doubts, to dispel her scruples; and he felt afraid—of what? that he should reproach her bitterly for the cruel manner in which she had trifled with his happiness, holding out and then drawing back from him the bliss of his whole life, as a child offers in sport, and then detains the plaything of the hour?—was he afraid that he should give way to complaints, and to upbraidings?—No; he was afraid that she might perceive, that she might guess, how wretched she had made him; that his voice, his face would betray the extent of his disappointment.

"She corresponds with him, I suppose," he said to himself, and a flush passed over his pale thoughtful face as the idea crossed his

mind, "to consult him how she may break the matter to me—how she can best explain what a mistake she made in thinking she loved me. I will make it all easy to her. She shall have no confessions, or explanations to go through. She looked so anxious this morning, so unlike what she was at Heron Castle. He thought of that day, that hour, when her arms had been round his neck, her cheek wet with tears, her voice broken by her trembling emotion, and his courage for a moment gave way. When he crossed the park on his way back to his hotel, he saw her in Lady Donnington's carriage, Lucy Vincent at her side, and her brother opposite to them. They passed close to him without seeing him, the string causing some delay near the Serpentine. Margaret was listening to Frederick Vincent with the most earnest attention, and seemed quite absorbed in her conversation with him. Walter watched the last fluttering corner of her veil as the carriage disappeared in the distance, and then proceeded, with a more determined step, to his lodging, and shut himself up for some hours, desiring the servant to deny him to every one, without exception.

During the next days, Margaret's engagements were very numerous, and although she endeavoured to see Walter whenever he called, and her manner to him was as affectionate as ever, he could not divest himself of the impression that she was altered to him, and his own manner, in consequence, was so depressed and nervous that it re-acted on her's, and a feeling of embarrassment, for the first time in their lives, sprung up between them. Under the belief that she was about to inform him that, according to his own suggestion, she had proved her own heart, and that it had not stood the test of absence and change of scene, he did not venture to express in words, and scarcely in his manner, the love which was overflowing in his heart, and which even jealousy could not embitter. Margaret was fond of admiration, and what homage can the world produce equal to that which she had been used to from Walter? the constant devotion, the unfailing tenderness of such an attachment as his, threw into shade all the flattery of ordinary admirers. But Walter was not the same in London as he had been at Grantley, and she asked herself with anxiety, if the change was in him or in herself. She grew provoked with what appeared to her his coldness and reserve, and in an unfortunate moment resolved to pique him by an appearance of equal indifference. Nor was this line of conduct merely passive; she flirted with others, and confirmed, by her manner, the suspicions he had already formed. Disappointed and vexed, she

could not adopt at once the tone of friendship which he successfully maintained at the cost of many a secret struggle. These struggles she never saw, nor did she guess at the deep current of feeling and of suffering which flowed under the surface of his habitual calmness. Estrangement imperceptibly rises in the heart as the gathering clouds gradually steal over the surface, and obscure the brightness of a serene sky; and thus it was rising between two hearts, in one of which, at least, there was nothing but affection, devotion, and an utter renouncement of selfish hopes and objects. But his reserve appeared to her like coldness, and she was not sorry that he should see the admiration she excited in others, and feel a little anxiety to retain that place in her affections which she had so freely granted to him. Frederic Vincent was, for many reasons, her most frequent and acceptable companion in Walter's absence, and sometimes even in his presence, when she wished to excite his jealousy, and to provoke him into showing it. It never entered into his mind to suppose that she could doubt the sincerity of his affection, and, therefore, any display of this kind only impressed upon him the belief that she repented of her engagement, and that it was his duty to release her from it, with as little pain to herself, and as much self-command on his part, as the circumstances of the case would admit of. On the evening before the play, she had pursued, more than usual, the line of conduct which led to this result, and Walter determined to leave London with as little delay as possible. He spent the next day in painful uncertainty regarding the manner of his departure, and the way in which he should announce it to Margaret. Towards seven o'clock in the evening, he received the following note from her :

“DEAREST WALTER,

“We called at your door, in the carriage, twice, and found that you were not at home. We wanted you to have dined here with Ginevra and me, before the play. My part is nothing to-night, and I have only to walk in and out of the stage in the second piece. I mean to see the first in comfort, and I send you a ticket for our box. You *must* see Ginevra act. She seems low, but not nervous. I do not think she cares much about it; but she is not well, and I feel anxious about her. Do come. Your most affectionate,

“MARGARET.”

The clock struck eight, and Ginevra was waiting for the end of

the overture, and the rising of the curtain. She had never felt less agitated in her life; at the same time that she was conscious she could get creditably through her part, she had no constitutional shyness, and no anxious vanity to disturb her. Edmund's absence weighed heavily on her mind. She had hoped, to the very last, that he would have had a wish, an interest, a curiosity—some feeling, in short—connected with her appearance on that night. Had *he* been among the audience in that crowded little theatre, she would not have sat so calmly awaiting the signal for her appearance. It was at last given, and she advanced on the stage, while the house rang with applause. The last words that had been uttered previous to her entrance were these—“*You will find the gaiety, which report has given to Miss Milner, softened by her recent sorrow to a meek sadness, and the haughty display of charms imputed to her manners, changed to a pensive demeanour.*” Ginevra's attitude and countenance answered so well to this description, that the applause redoubled, as she raised her eyes to Sir Charles d'Arcy, who was acting the part of Dorriforth,¹ and kneeling to him for a moment, promised in a trembling voice, to obey him as her guardian and her father. And now the noise subsides, and the play proceeds.

Mrs. Wyndham, pleased with the *début*, fears that the next scenes will want the animation which that sprightly dialogue and that rapid action demand. Margaret bends forward in her place, as if she would have flown upon the stage if she could, to excite the spirits of her sister, who looks pale through the artificial colour on her cheeks, and who moves languidly when she ought to be sprightly. Colonel Leslie withdraws to the back of the box, and unconsciously tears to pieces the play-bill in his hands. It is Ginevra's turn to speak—the prompter has given the word, there is a pause—she begins a sentence, and stops. Margaret's breath is stopping too. Colonel Leslie changes colour, they look away, they look again; she is speaking now, and what a change has passed over that pensive face, that languid frame? What light is beaming in those eyes—what smiles are playing on those lips—what animation reigns in every gesture, in every motion, in every glance! “*Miss Milner has regained that vivacity and all those airy charms whose transcendent power had been absorbed for awhile by the influence of sorrow.*”

¹ In the French play from which this drama was reproduced, Dorriforth, Miss Milner's guardian, is not, as in the novel, a Roman Catholic priest, but a Knight of Malta, bound to celibacy by the rules of his order, not by any solemn religious vows.

She looks at Dorriforth, and an expression of the keenest sensibility marks her countenance. The passion of a mistress, and the tenderness of a wife, are in that glance. She flirts with Lord Frederick, and there is a gaiety, an arch simplicity, a restless animation in her manner, in the quick turn of her eye, and in the rapid delivery of her answers. She persecutes Sandford, her inveterate and stubborn adversary, with an unrelenting flow of wit and feminine animosity; and when she laughs, and Mrs. Horton, with an enraged voice and aspect, prays heaven to forgive her for laughing, she laughs on, as if nothing could stop that outburst of gaiety, that exuberance of youthful spirits, which plays in every feature of her face, which resounds in every accent of her clear voice. The audience applaud and applaud again, and she laughs on; she cannot stop, she is overpowered with the humour of the moment, with the gaiety of her heart.

"What an actress! How she acts!" is whispered in the pit, in the boxes, in the galleries. The first act ends, the curtain falls, the applause continues.

"How can you sit on, like a stone, Neville, when that girl is enough to drive one mad? Did you ever see anything so captivating? D'Arcy is desperately in love with her. No wonder, for they have been rehearsing together, morning, noon, and night, for the last three weeks. *Il en est fou—on le serait à moins.*"

If Edmund Neville's neighbours wished to drive him mad, they could not have held a more fitting discourse. His cheek is pale with anger. The demon of jealousy is busy at his heart, and these remarks are adding fuel to the flame. She has not answered his letters—she has disregarded his requests, his entreaties, against her acting—she has cast him off, and the ties which he has refused to acknowledge, have ceased to bind her conscience. He blames, he condemns, he despises her—he thinks her religion might have taught her better. He forgets everything, but that he loves her still, and that she loves him no more. He darts out of the orchestra, where he had found a place just as the play was beginning—he makes his way to the green-room; she is standing by Sir Charles d'Arcy—she is bending over a book, and with an animated expression, she is explaining to him the manner of pronouncing a particular sentence. He learns it from her, and he says with an intense expression of feeling,

"*I am transported at the tidings you have revealed! and yet, perhaps, it would have been better if I had never heard them.*"

She rewards him with a bright smile, and says with an accent of indescribable gaiety—

“We shall succeed to-night. All will go well to-night!” and she leads the way towards the stage, as if impatient to appear there again.

Edmund turns away with a feeling of rage in his heart, and mounting the narrow stairs that lead to the stage boxes, he enters Mrs. Fraser’s box, and is warmly welcomed by her; he seats himself in the very centre of it, and with her fan in one hand, and his head resting on the other, he watches the curtain rise, with a storm of vindictive resentment boiling in his breast. Ginevra is discovered alone, her eyes are fixed upon the ground, and a slow smile plays over her face as she utters these words: “*Are not my charms even more invincible than I ever believed them to be?*” She raises them and glances at the corner of the orchestra; ever and anon throughout the next scenes she directs her eyes to the same spot, and each time with a more anxious expression; and now, during an interval between two sentences, she casts a timid glance towards the boxes and perceives Edmund sitting by Mrs. Fraser in an attitude which indicates the attentions of a lover. She trembles, her limbs seem to sink with her, a cloud dims her sight. She cannot act with this fear in her heart; with that sight before her eyes she cannot rouse herself—she dares not look again in that direction—she presses her hand on her heart to still its beating, and the while, deafening bursts of applause ring through the house. Again and again they are repeated, and she stands for a moment confused and bewildered. “Go on now, go on,” is whispered around her, and the prompter begins the sentence that she must utter. “*The part which I undertook to perform,*” he whispers; she catches the sound, and in a voice that thrills the audience by the passionate energy with which it is pronounced, she exclaims: “*The part which I undertook to perform is over; I will now for my whole life appear in my own character, and give a loose to the anguish I endure.*” Fresh bursts of applause ensue, for there is a wildness and a tenderness in the inflections of the young actress’s voice, and in the expression of her face, which elicit transports of enthusiasm from the astonished spectators. The scene is drawing to a close, the hands of the two principal actors are joined together, and the curtain prepares to fall; Ginevra glances at the ring which has been placed on her finger, and shudders.

“Did you see that? Did you observe it?” is whispered through

the house by all those who are acquainted with the "Simple Story" in its original form. Did you see that; did you observe it, Edmund Neville? Have you too remarked that strange piece of acting. Have your eyes met her's as the curtain descends between you. You have, and you can scarcely restrain the impetuous impulse which is hurrying you to her side. You start when Mrs. Fraser touches your arm and claims your attention; but you dare not move, for Charles Neville is by your side. He has been haunting your steps and watching your movements—he has been gazing alternately on Ginevra and on you, and when, pale with anger and with jealousy, you turned away from the door of the green-room, he was there with his stiff scrutiny and his mute investigation. The second piece begins, and in one of the opposite boxes, pale, dejected, like a bruised lily, between her father and Walter Sydney, sits Ginevra. The audience have recognised her, and the murmurs of applause rise again to greet her. The scene is for a moment suspended, and Miss Leslie's name is vociferated with enthusiasm. She shrinks back, then bending forward, bows and withdraws. Colonel Leslie wraps a shawl around her, and she leans against him for support. She gazes on Edmund as if her soul would force its way to his, through that long and earnest gaze, and with a mute supplication she calls him to her side. He leaves the opposite box, and a flush of pleasure tinges her pale cheeks. She watches every sound, she counts the seconds by the pulsations of her own heart,—she hears a step, she sees the handle of the door turn—she cannot draw her breath, the expectation is so intense. Walter rises to open the door, and Charles Neville enters. She bursts into tears, she can no longer feign or struggle, and the disappointment is too much for her worn-out frame and exhausted spirits. "Father, take me home," she murmurs, as Colonel Leslie almost carried her away. And when she had reached her home, and the door of her room had closed upon her, when she is alone, she says again: "O Father, take me home!" This time it is to her Father in heaven that she speaks, and the house she prays to reach is not an earthly home.

Meanwhile, Margaret has been performing successfully her slight part in the afterpiece, and has gone on to Mrs. Wyndham's, where the *corps dramatique*, and some of the audience, had assembled to supper. Mrs. Fraser seemed to breathe more freely, now that the time was come for shining herself, instead of admiring others. Self-possession, and an immense fund of good-humoured imperti-

nence, the most difficult weapon to guard against, or to withstand, were her chief advantages in conversation. She had the rare power of talking nonsense without appearing silly, and of insulting people without transgressing in the least the rules of good breeding. This talent she exercised amply that evening, and the shafts of her satire flew right and left, and some, *not* at random sent, fell on Ginevra, the heroine of the night. Some remark with regard to the sequel of the frail Miss Milner's history, which some one present wished to be dramatised, drew from her an ingenious reply, in which it was gently insinuated that the sequel might, perhaps, find its place in real life, if not on the stage. Margaret, whose presence had escaped her notice at that moment, turned crimson, and by a strange instinct looked at Edmund Neville. He was deadly pale, with what kind of emotion she could not devise; she felt frightened at the expression of his face. Some one present, who was unaware of her relationship to Ginevra, took up Mrs. Fraser's remark in a sneering tone, and was stopped by an explosion of such passion, that it startled all the bystanders, as if an electric shock had touched them. None knew exactly what had been said; there had been a muttered oath, and a few unintelligible words pronounced, and then a dead silence had followed, and for a few instants, Mrs. Fraser seemed subdued more from excessive surprise and bewilderment than from intimidation. As to Margaret, her resentment was swallowed up in wonder and emotion at that new chink which seemed to open upon her, and to let in light on the subject of her investigations. Soon after the party broke up, and she passed through the first drawing-room without seeing Walter, who was sitting at a table near the door, examining an album, with that apparent attention, and entire absence of mind, which belongs to an absorbing pre-occupation. He had been seated by her side during the exciting performance of that evening; her manner had been kind and affectionate. Once, in a moment of anxiety about Ginevra's acting, she had put her hand in his, and during the last affecting scenes, she had turned to him an expression of countenance, which had revived his hopes, and almost overcome his composure. Unable to endure the suspense between his recent fears, and his renewed hopes, he whispered to her during an *entr'acte*—

"You said this morning, Margaret, that you would have something to confide to me. Is it—"

"Oh, yes! dear Walter," she interrupted, with an appearance of

great emotion, "something of importance, but which I cannot speak of yet. I do not feel sure enough.—I could not bear to say it, while it may still be all a mistake. But soon, very soon, I think—" and at that moment her eyes were turned towards the part of the house where Frederic Vincent was sitting, and before she had finished her sentence, the entrance of another person into the box interrupted the conversation. From that instant, the music sounded discordantly in Walter's ears—the lights seemed to hurt his eyes—the close atmosphere to stifle him—the noise of voices about him to produce a sensation of pain, and all the energies of his being to concentrate in the effect of concealing that pain.

The next time Margaret spoke to him, there were strangers between them; he answered just as gently as usual, but there was a slight alteration in his voice. When, after the supper, which had followed the play, Margaret passed close to him without being aware of his presence, he was revolving in his mind the incidents of that evening, and endeavouring to draw from them some final conclusion. A few moments afterwards, he heard her voice in the door-way, and in an opposite looking-glass he saw that she was speaking to Vincent. "I have something to tell you," he heard her say in a low voice: "And I have a letter to show you," he answered, in the same tone. The next words escaped him, but an instant afterwards he heard her say in a tone of great feeling, "O Frederic! you cannot think how anxious and unhappy I sometimes feel," and then there was some muttered answer, and a movement in the next room, and he heard no more. But he had heard enough to make him resolve on his own course. Speedily he revolved in his own mind the past and the present, and determined to withdraw silently from the position in which he was placed, without giving her even the pang of an explanation, or the embarrassment of an avowal. He meant to leave London at once, but, to return to Heron Castle, to Grantley Manor, and to his poor mother, was beyond his strength; and he asked himself whither he should go. When the young and the happy ask themselves that question, it is one of the most joyous of soliloquies; one of the brightest of their communings with the free and eager spirit within them; but when in affliction, in deep dejection, under severe disappointments, we ask ourselves "Where we shall go," then the heart pities itself, while it seems to mock, by the vain question, its own utter desolation. Walter had asked himself two or three times that evening where he should go, when

Mrs. Wyndham's only son, a youth of eighteen, who was about to set off for Paris on the next day, proposed to him in the most earnest and cordial manner to go with him. A gleam of pleasure that shot through his mother's eyes at the suggestion, enforced the request. With all the anxiety of maternal solicitude, she had seen her son about to travel abroad alone, and had so entirely failed in her efforts at opposing the scheme, that this new suggestion filled her with delight. Without pledging himself to it Walter half agreed to the proposal, and when he reached home that night, he wrote the following letter to Margaret:—

“ I do not know if you will be surprised at the sudden change in my plans, my dearest Margaret, or feel disappointed that I do not remain to receive the communication you promised. The fact is that, for yourself and for me, it is far better that I should not stay in London. You know, dearest, how I love you, but you cannot know how anxious that love makes me, or how much I reproach myself for the errors into which my affection and anxiety lead me. I will not attempt to conceal from you, that it has not been without a painful struggle that I have come to this decision, nor pretend that I shall not suffer in carrying it out; but, at the same time, I am sure that you will hardly believe how faint were the hopes I cherished that the dream of Heron Castle would ever become a reality. It brightened for a while the solitude of my destiny, and cheered the tedious hours of sickness and suffering. They have faded away, and life has reassumed its former aspect—not quite its former aspect—but as much of it as is needful for the patient endurance of the present hour, and the accomplishment of present duties. I wish to leave you free, not only free from constraint, but free from embarrassment. I go for a short time to Paris, and when I return, you can call me Old Walter again, as in former days, and tell me all your secrets, as if we had never had one of our own. I am glad to have that secret to keep in my heart, dearest Margaret. It shall be the romance of my life, the source and the centre of all the deep emotions of my soul. I know that you have a true affection for your first, your oldest—may I say, your *best* friend? I know you well enough to believe that rather than cause me pain, you would come to me to-morrow, and once more bind yourself to me by kind words and generous promises, and therefore it is that I go, and without seeing you again. I know you too well, thank heaven, to suspect you of any coquetry or any unfairness towards me or towards others.

What I have seen with my own eyes, and heard with my own ears, and what your own words have given me to understand, is enough. Heaven bless you, dearest Margaret. Heaven reward you for all that you have been to me since the days of your infancy, up to this hour, in which I bless you with the same fervour, and the same freedom from selfish hopes and fears and regrets, as when I stood by your cradle, some twenty years ago. When the doubt that still hangs over your future fate is solved, write to me without any misgivings. Remember, that to tell Old Walter that you are happy, is to make him so; though his joy may seem to himself and to others like grief, it will be great as his love for you, and nothing can be greater. And now, farewell, and God bless you, Margaret Leslie. I have said much, but not all I feel about you and for you. Your most affectionate,

"WALTER."

"P. S. — I start with young Wyndham at an early hour to-morrow. Give my love to your father and Ginevra. Write to me about her; how beautiful but how ill she looked last night."

Tired with the exertions and the excitement of the previous evening, Margaret slept till past twelve o'clock on the next day, and when she woke, and saw several letters lying by her bedside, she stretched out her hand, and drew Walter's from among them, with a feeling of wonder at its size and apparent length. She opened it, and started with surprise at the tone and the tenor of its contents. She was disposed to irritation; several circumstances had combined to annoy her; and this misunderstanding (if, indeed, misunderstanding there was), exasperated her to the greatest degree. Tears of vexation stood in her eyes. Walter was gone without seeing her, and placed her under the painful necessity of writing an explanation which she was particularly desirous of making (if indeed she made it at all) by word of mouth, or of leaving him under an impression, which she scarcely knew how to define. There is no doubt that we are apt to judge the conduct of others with peculiar severity when we are secretly dissatisfied with our own, and that to be provoked with those we love distorts our understanding as much as it disturbs our peace of mind.

Nervous and irritable from fatigue and excitement, Margaret resented Walter's conduct, as if it amounted to an insult. She went almost into a passion, spoke (luckily she was alone and spoke to herself—what nonsense people talk to themselves sometimes) of

his absurd jealousy, his ridiculous suspicions; recollected that after all it was she who had originally proposed to marry him—she actually turned crimson at the thought, but there was more of resentment than of modesty in the emotion. She suggested to herself (without in the least believing it) that he was a regular old bachelor, and did not want to marry at all, and was seeking to find a pretext for giving her up. She said for the next hour, to herself and of him, all the most disagreeable things she could think of, and then felt a little relieved, and by degrees a smile passed over her face. Perhaps she was glad to be released, and then she read his letter again, and a tear, a bright round tear, glistened in her eye, and then stole down her cheek—perhaps she was forgiving him. In another hour's time she was at her writing table, and this note was written, sealed, and sent to Paris :—

“ It is your own fault if you choose to give up our schemes of happiness. I am not going to propose to you a second time, for I begin to think you would be a sort of Bluebeard in modern dress. I should be always watching for the key, or, like another Anne Boleyn, laying hold of my neck to make sure that my head was still upon my shoulders. You are grown so very flighty, Old Walter, that it is difficult to keep up with you, both literally and figuratively. You take a crotchet into your head, and fly off to Paris like a lover in a novel. To think of *my* having to scold *you* for rashness, and precipitancy, and thoughtlessness! It is rather pleasant to turn the tables upon you. I do not know what *you saw with your own eyes and heard with your own ears* (it must have been something very dreadful to have sent you rambling over the world in this hair-brained fashion), but as to *what my own words gave you to understand*, your comprehension was decidedly at fault, and your journey to Paris quite superfluous. When you want to solve this riddle, you may come here again. Did you really think that your little Margaret was going to give you up? O dearest Walter! if truth, and honour, and love were banished from the world, I should know where to seek for them—not in the hearts of kings, as the French monarch fondly deemed, but in a heart that I am proud and happy to claim as my own, by right of birth, Old Walter, and by right of conquest, too. When you can decently abandon your travelling companion, come and *see with your own eyes, and hear with your own ears*, that I love you as dearly, more dearly, than ever; and help me by your counsel to attain an object which, next to your

affection, is dearer to me than anything else in life. Ever, dear
Walter, your most affectionate

"MARGARET."

Owing to some mistake in the direction, this letter did not reach Walter till long after it was written, and in the meantime we must, in another chapter, follow the progress of Geneva's history.

CHAPTER XVII.

It was the day after the play, and a hot July afternoon. Margaret was lying on the sofa, quite exhausted with heat and fatigue, when she raised her eyes, and observed that Ginevra was dressed to go out.

"Where on earth are you going, this broiling day?" she exclaimed, tired at the very idea of stirring.

"To Lady Mordaunt's breakfast," answered her sister, without raising her eyes from her book. "Mrs Wyndham will call for me in a moment."

"I could as soon fly across the Park as go with you," Margaret returned, while she bathed her own head and hands with Eau de Cologne. "And you ought not to go,"—she continued, raising herself on the cushions, and observing the almost transparent whiteness of Ginevra's complexion, and the dark shade under her eyes.

"I must go," she answered quickly, "I have promised."

"Whom?" Margaret asked.

"Myself," she replied; and her sister saw that there were tears in her eyes.

"Oh, Ginevra, take care what you do," she cried, for a vague fear connected with Neville's return seized her at that moment, and she gazed on her with an almost frightened expression. "Ginevra," she said, timidly, "remember that my father—your father—loves nothing in the world but you; remember how much he has suffered, and that if you——"

"O Margaret, in mercy!"—The pale girl clasped her hands together, and then raised them to heaven with an expression of such intense supplication, that her very attitude was a prayer in itself. "Do not try to stop me," she said hurriedly, "for I *must* go."

"Ginevra," cried Margaret, starting to her feet, and throwing her arms round her, "Ginevra, you are not going for—for ever."

"O no, dearest, no! Be calm, Margaret, I am not going to leave

you. It would be better for you if I was. I have thrown a dark shade over your life. I know it—I feel it—but I never will steal away from you like a culprit. I will speak, before I leave you, sister. Do not be afraid," she added, and her brow contracted as she spoke; "I have no home, no hope on earth, no refuge, but your love."

At that moment a loud rap at the door announced Mrs. Wyndham's carriage, and her voice was heard on the stairs. She was come to persuade Margaret to go with them, but she vainly urged it, and was obliged to content herself with carrying off Ginevra. In the caleche, was seated Sir Charles d'Arcy, whose eyes lighted up with pleasure when he saw her, and whom she greeted kindly. Her mind was so absorbed in one subject, that she had not had leisure to observe his devotion to her. She had not the slightest idea that he was supposed to like her, or that his attentions were generally remarked and commented upon. Margaret was aware of it; but in all that concerned Ginevra, she felt as if treading on delicate and dangerous ground. If she suggested to her too soon the necessity of seriously considering the nature of his sentiments or of her own, she might possibly be interfering prematurely in an affair, which, under certain aspects, and under certain contingencies, might turn out to be highly desirable, and, also, whenever at the beginning of their stay in London, she had, seriously, or in joke, alluded to the admiration Ginevra inspired, or to the attentions that were paid her, she had invariably seen an expression of indescribable annoyance on her sister's face, which had induced her to abandon the subject. Ginevra's manner had therefore been constantly courteous, kind, and free from all constraint in her intercourse with Sir Charles, whom she liked as an acquaintance, and, latterly, had grown to consider almost as a friend. He was very much in love with her, but his manners and his character were essentially English, and therefore, to one who, like her, was little acquainted with society, and whose ideas of love were derived partly from books—but chiefly from the vehement expressions and emotions which had attended the course of Neville's romantic courtship, and passionate devotion to her—the placid and calm interest which was evinced in her welfare, the quiet watchfulness which marked the attentions of Sir Charles d'Arcy, and the deep but concentrated expressions of feeling which escaped him, did not convey any notion of the real nature of his sentiments, or warn her from encouraging them by marks of preference which she naturally showed to one for whom her esteem was great and her regard sincere.

This conduct on her part, joined to the emotion which some casual expression sometimes caused her—to the agitation which he had sometimes noticed in her manner and in her countenance without being able to assign it a cause—had given him hopes that she reciprocated his attachment; and on the preceding evening he had confided these hopes to Mrs. Wyndham, and intreated her to interest herself in his favour. To be made the confidant in an affair of this kind was one of the happiest incidents in her life; and actually to be the chaperon on the occasion when a proposal might be anticipated, almost turned her head with joy and excitement. Her great object in persuading Margaret to go to the breakfast had been that she might have conversed incessantly with her as they drove to Rosewood, and have thus left the lovers, as she designated them already, in peace and comfort on the opposite side of the carriage; but this scheme failing, she vainly sought for some mode of suppressing herself altogether—of annihilating herself for the time being. She would have liked to *faire la morte*, like her own spaniel, or to have been for an hour—

“ In second childishness and mere oblivion.”

But it would not do; she could not offer to shut her eyes and her ears, or go to sleep or read the “Court Guide;” the two last expedients she attempted, but it did not help on matters; and in this unsatisfactory state of mind she remained till they reached Rosewood, and joined the numerous groups of people who were already assembled on the lawn.

A band of music was playing in one place, some Swiss peasants singing in another, children dressed as children should not be—that is, so smartly, that they ought not to tear their clothes; and yet scampering about happily, doing exactly what they should not have done, with their lace frocks and gauze bonnets—were running round and round between people's feet. Girls were sitting talking as if talk was the business of life; and men standing about, as if to be bored was the inevitable condition of humanity from which they sought no refuge and no escape. Some mothers, anxious about their daughters' parasols being up and their veils down; others pursuing their younger offspring through bushes and beds of flowers; some full of hopes and schemes, others full of weariness and heart-sickness; some anxious about themselves or curious about others; a few enjoying themselves in the pure air, in the gay scene, with the joyous music and the romping children

—happy in the sight of happiness, and confronting in their radiant smiles some of those careworn visages—

“As rich sunbeams and dark bursts of rain
Meet in the sky.”

In a moment Ginevra was surrounded by a tribe of children, among whom the little Vincents, some of Lady Donnington's youngest boys, were foremost.

“Oh, Ginevra,” exclaimed a little fellow of six years old; “come pull off your bonnet, and put on your scarf in that queer way in which you used to wear it at Genoa.”

“Oh, yes,” cried a little girl; and do sing us that funny Italian song.”

Ginevra tried to escape, but children (*les enfants terribles*) are unmerciful, and she was forced upon a garden chair, her bonnet removed, and her scarf presented to her with earnest entreaties that she would put it on. She complied with a smile, and with one child on her knee and the others crowding round her, she repeated in a low voice a few stanzas of the comic song they asked for.

“Louder,” cried the little tyrants; and “louder” was repeated by the older spectators that had also assembled round her. The children were delighted, and one little thing climbing behind her tried to put a garland of roses on her head, but the flowers fell to pieces, and the scattered leaves flew about her. There was one gazing upon her at that moment, who remembered the Casa Masani and the first day in which he had seen her playing also with children and roses. Alas! he had stolen away the youthfulness of her spirit—the roses of her life—and planted many a sharp thorn in her path. He had made sad havoc in her life, and in his own too. Was he not suffering more than herself in that instant? Who can tell? Who can decide upon the acuteness of sufferings they have not felt—upon the capabilities of suffering, in natures so different?

Edmund Neville had been standing on the steps of the house at the moment of her arrival, and had heard the various observations which had been elicited among the bystanders by Sir Charles d'Arcy's appearance in Mrs. Wyndham's carriage.

“Is not that Miss Leslie and her *futur*?” asked one person, spying in Ginevra, as she was getting out of the carriage.

“They are not engaged yet,” answered another.

"But ought to be, at the rate they are going on," retorted the first speaker.

"She is pretty enough to be fastidious," said a third.

"Will she have him?" asked a fourth.

"She is a great flirt if she does not like him," was replied.

"He has been *à ses pieds* for the last three weeks, and the other day one could see that she acted her part *con amore*."

Edmund had not seen the rehearsals of that play; he did not know what sudden emotion had given rise to the vivacity and the tenderness with which those exciting scenes had been rendered, and which had formed such a contrast to the languor of her previous attempts, and these careless observations renewed the jealous pangs he had endured at the time. He had stood behind her in gloomy silence while she sung, and her eyes had vainly wandered over the lawn, and towards the house, in search of him. Her aunt came up to her at that moment, and proposed to walk round the grounds. She readily consented, in the hopes of thus meeting Edmund, and taking Sir Charles d'Arcy's offered arm, she followed Mrs. Wyndham, who had prudently secured a companion for the occasion.

After crossing a parterre, which divided the lawn from a wood beyond it, they entered the conservatory, and the smell of the orange flowers drew from Ginevra an exclamation of pleasure, which was instantly succeeded by so deep a sigh that it excited the attention of her companion. He spoke of Italy, and she bent her head over the white blossoms to conceal the tears that filled her eyes. When she raised it again, Mrs. Wyndham had disappeared, and Sir Charles d'Arcy's countenance was unusually animated. He was looking at her with an indefinable anxiety, and when she turned towards the door, he detained her by pointing out a fountain, whose mimic showers watered the neighbouring plants. Before she had ceased admiring it, he had twice begun a sentence which he abruptly terminated. There was something in the expression of the pale gentle face he so much loved, that failed to give him courage; but he was not a man that gave way to nervousness beyond a certain point. He had made up his mind to speak on that day, and in that hour, and he did speak. His words were manly, honest, kind; perhaps more earnest than ardent, more tender than impassioned; but he grew eloquent by degrees, and no woman could have listened unmoved to the avowal of such an attachment. It was so true, so deep, so real, it carried conviction to the mind—it honoured her and himself. She was taken by surprise; could not,

did not interrupt him. He gathered hope from the circumstance, and looked into her face; tears were rolling down her cheeks. Her emotion transported him; he took her hand. She did not withdraw it abruptly; she disengaged it gently; and then, with a deep sigh, regained her self-possession, and said, simply and earnestly,

"This should never have been; and if I can hope that you will forgive me for any involuntary encouragement I may have given you, it is that I believe you to be too generous to reproach me for an error—too true yourself to suspect me of want of truth. I did not know that you loved me, that you had ever felt for me a stronger interest than that of kindness and esteem; such an interest I must *always* feel for you, Sir Charles, but *never* can feel any other."

"Why so deeply moved, then?" he exclaimed, unable to reconcile her emotion with the decisive tenor of her words. "Is it pity for me that makes you weep?"

"No!" she said in a very low voice; "it is myself I pity, not you."

"Ginevra!" he said, eagerly, "do not forbid me to hope."

"Hope!" she repeated, with a look of perplexity. "Hope? I implore you to put away all idea of love for me, if you would not make me miserable. You cannot be too strongly assured that it would be wrong and vain to indulge such a thought."

"Wrong it cannot be, to love you; vain it may be; but that is a question for my own heart to decide. You cannot reproach yourself, Miss Leslie; you have spoken plainly enough. I shall not thrust upon you the expression of an attachment which offends you; but in secret you cannot forbid me to cherish it, and, till the day that you marry another, I shall never cease."

"Oh! do not say so," she interrupted with agitation.

"Is it, perhaps," he continued, with sudden animation,—"is it on account of my religion that you reject me?"

She shook her head; but he persisted.

"Remember, that your attachment to your own faith, that your fidelity to sacred duties and sincere convictions, would be to me the surest ground of my confidence, the greatest claim to my respect, and the warrant of my own hopes for time and for eternity."

Each word that he uttered seemed to mark the contrast between *his* conduct and feelings, and those of Edmund Neville, and to bring

before her the picture of her wrongs and of her trials. She could hardly subdue her emotion, or reiterate with sufficient calmness her refusal—her entreaties that he would overcome an affection which she could never requite; and, when on his repeated prayer that she would at least tell him if her own were engaged she assented at last by a brief monosyllable, and turned her burning cheek away from him—she almost felt as if she had betrayed Edmund and made a fatal admission.

At that moment she saw her husband standing at the opposite door from that by which she and her companion had entered the conservatory—his face as pale as a sheet, and his eyes flashing with anger. She sprung forward as if to join him, and then recollecting, with a bewildered feeling, the peculiarity of her situation, she turned towards the other door. Sir Charles d'Arcy followed her, and they rapidly crossed the flower-garden, in the direction of the lawn. When they reached it, the band was playing a waltz, and dancing was going on. She looked out anxiously for Mrs. Wyndham, but trembled so much that she did not venture abruptly to leave the arm of her companion. In a moment Edmund was by her side; he offered her his arm, as if they were engaged to dance. She took it in silence, and they stood among the crowd. Suddenly a voice at his elbow said,

“You do not waltz—what are you about?”

It was Mrs. Fraser who spoke. Then Ginevra felt that they flew swiftly round and round, in the midst of that crowd, to the sound of that loud music, and she scarcely knew if what oppressed her heart and her brain was joy or suffering. His arm was round her waist, and her head was gradually sinking on his shoulder.

“Stop!” she said; and they drew back and pierced that crowd, and still he dragged her along, without speaking, down a long shrubby walk, and across a wood, till they reached a small temple, built in the Italian style, which stood at the end of a vista. Edmund darted within it and closed the door, bolting it inside. The coolness of the atmosphere revived her. He had let go her hand, and was standing opposite to her with his arms folded, and his countenance lowering with speechless anger. She clasped her hands, and exclaimed—

“At last!—and thus!” and then, rising with impetuosity, she stood before him, and raising her head proudly, returned his glance; and in hers there were such mighty upbraidings, such overpowering reproaches, so eloquent in their silence, so strong in their

mildness, that he faltered under its speechless influence, and exclaimed—

“Ginevra, you can break my heart, but not bend my will. You may plunge us both into despair, but you shall not pursue your course unmolested. Do not imagine that you can brave me in every way, or that I will not sacrifice everything in the world, rather than endure the silent humiliation of the last few days—your name in every mouth!—your shame proclaimed aloud! Aye, your shame, though the world knows it not, and into my very ears instils the poison of its slanders. Did you imagine I should bear this, and tamely acquiesce in my dishonour and in yours? To my face, this very day, displaying with audacity—”

The colour rushed to her face; a storm was gathering on her brow; a torrent of recrimination was rising to her lips; a woman's insulted, wounded, goaded feelings were struggling for mastery, and well nigh burst all barriers, and broke through all restraints; but she paused, and prayed for patience, and with a strong hand kept down that rising passion, and, with an effort of more than human virtue, pleaded for herself. *She*, the victim to the tyrant, the deserted wife to the jealous husband! Oh, what a relief to the oppressed spirit it would have been to defy, to threaten, to upbraid, to take a haughty stand on the ground he had assigned her, to brave his anger, to scorn his threats in his presence, even if her own heart should afterwards break in his absence! But there was a word stamped upon her brain, engraved upon her heart, which passion could not efface, or anger obliterate. *Expiation* was that word; and it brought her to his feet, not to plead guilty to his charges, but to accuse her own ignorance, to entreat his indulgence, to implore his guidance, and then, with her eyes fixed upon his face, and her hand clasped in his, to wait for his next words, as if her sentence of life or of death turned upon them. And now was her worst trial—now her guardian angel must support her—now the saints in heaven should pray for her—for Edmund has drawn her to his breast, and his heart is beating against hers, and his eyes are fixed upon hers with unutterable love; and that voice, which she has so often in her solitude pined to hear, is pouring forth into her ears words of passionate affection, of ardent supplication, and when she attempts to speak, he closes her mouth with kisses, and draws her still closer to himself. He pleads, he reasons, he holds the cup of bliss to her lips, he tempts her by every art, he scares her by every fear. She grows paler

and paler as the fierce conflict lasts, and then suddenly leaving his side, she stands before him, and says—

“What is it you forfeit by acknowledging your marriage? Is it money?”

There was no scorn in her voice or in her face as she said this. She spoke the words clearly and distinctly, and fixed her eyes upon him with a look of piercing interrogation. He turned pale with anger, then crimson with shame, and then sternly calm, as he replied—

“I have pledged myself, by assuming my present position, not to acknowledge a marriage with a Catholic. Such an avowal *now* would cover me with dishonour, and take it out of my power to fulfil the most sacred engagements.”

“The most sacred engagements!” she slowly repeated; “you talk of sacred engagements! Heaven forgive you, Edmund, for you make light of yours to me—or of mine to God!”

She laid her hand on his shoulder, looked in his face, and said in a low and impressive voice—

“Edmund, how you would despise me, if I yielded to you.”

He looked up hurriedly; these words had given him a faint hope; but yet his heart, strange to say, almost sunk within him at the perception of her supposed weakness.

“It would be a proof of love, my Ginevra, for which I should bless you—”

“For an hour or a day,” she exclaimed; “and then—Edmund, life is too short, eternity too long, for such a sacrifice. Leave me—leave me; I cannot endure this trial much longer. I love you, and I make you miserable. I would give my life for you, and I embitter yours; my wretchedness can scarcely be more complete.”

“Go,” said Edmund, gloomily; “go, and tell your family—go, and tell that crowd of people yonder, that you are my wife. Then, at least, no insolent admirers will dare, for a while, to address you; and if they ask what is become of your husband, you may tell them that he is ruined, dishonoured, and undone, through you, and by you—”

He stopped, and gazing upon her with a mixture of love and anger, suddenly burst forth—

“And are there no duties, then, in your eyes, but such as you use against me? Was it right to defy me—to resist my positive

commands, when I had charged you not to appear in public, or to act with that man, whom all London calls your lover? Is your fidelity to your creed, the cover for such moral transgressions as these? And are you conscientious only when your scruples drive a dagger into my heart?"

"Edmund," she exclaimed, with a bewildered expression, "I never received such a command from you. For weeks, I watched—I longed—I pined—for a word from you, and, day by day, woke with hope, and laid down in disappointment. Oh! dearest—dearest Edmund, believe me; I have never wilfully offended or disobeyed you."

"No, by all that is sacred, you never have!" he cried in deep emotion, and snatched her to his breast. "You are an angel, and I am a fiend. But those letters—I sent them as usual to Cara-felli!"

"Edmund, *he* died three months ago. I thought you knew it. His poor wife told me you did. And your last letter was so—so stern—that I thought you had cast me off for ever."

A sound of voices startled her: she turned very pale.

"We shall be seen!" she said, and trembled violently, "and then you or I shall be undone."

The sounds subsided, and he said abruptly—

"Have you made your choice?"

"What choice can I make? My fate is in your hands."

"You do not intend, then, to proclaim your marriage?"

"Is it in mockery that you speak thus, Edmund? Can you suppose that I would accuse you to others, ignorant and helpless as I am? No, I will be silent; at least, as long as a hope is left me that you will relent, and yourself—"

"You are willing to return to your home, then, and to your present mode of life? It is gay enough, no doubt, and you have Sir Charles d'Arcy's devotion."

"This is too much, Edmund; this is more than man should inflict, or woman can endure. To cast me off like a discarded mistress because I stand between you and your wealth—and then to accuse me falsely, and turn my very patience into a crime—was there ever a woman so used, a wife so insulted? Go, Edmund, leave me now. You have filled the measure of your wrongs by that sneer, which you will remember one day with remorse. Let me go. You shall not detain me here."

She pushed open the door, sprang down the steps with a rapidity which took him by surprise, and disappeared from his sight in an instant.

He stood gazing on that darkening avenue as if the light of his existence had passed away, as well as the light of day. He adored Ginevra, and long ago would have braved all the misery of disclosure, if the spirit of suspicion and jealousy had not taken possession of his mind. His character was naturally inclined to harbour this spirit; and the strange circumstances of his married life had tended to foster these bad qualities. From the moment that Ginevra's religion presented an obstacle to his views, he had persuaded himself that if she really loved him, she would yield to him a point which, in his eyes, appeared of secondary importance; and which, unprincipled and governed by passion as he was himself, he could not conceive should keep its ground against such love as she professed to feel for him. This was the source of all his bitter reproaches, of his ceaseless persecutions. This was what armed him against her tears, and excited him almost to madness, when he supposed that she willingly acquiesced in her fate. Strange to say, that much as he warned and threatened her against disclosing their marriage, he sometimes felt indignant and angry that she did not assert her claims, and proclaim herself his wife. Great as had been his despair at the prospect of losing his inheritance at the time of his father's death, and fearful the embarrassments into which that loss would involve him, this feeling, at times, almost merged in his irritation at what he supposed to be her coldness and indifference to himself, and his own want of influence over her—for it was thus he qualified her unshaken firmness in adhering to her religion. When one of these feelings for a time subsided, the other gained ground. He tried her feeling by absence, by an ostentatious flirtation with a coquette; and he heard of her in London, surrounded, and admired, and apparently contented with her fate. He returned to England, and found her the object of what were considered serious attentions, and acting in a play where the very man who excited his jealousy, performed the part of her lover. At that moment he would have been willing to forego fortune, reputation, everything, either to be reassured or revenged; but when she had justified herself, and that in her face, and in her words, he discerned the love that she still bore him, his old feelings returned, and he again, with a strange perversity, strove to terrify and force her into compliance. When she left him in indignant resentment

at his suspicions, he, by turns, accused her and himself—would have given worlds to recall her—and yet felt conscious that if he did it would only be to renew his persecutions.

It was late in the evening before he made his way back to the house, which was brilliantly lighted, and where dancing was going on. He gave a hurried glance round the room, and saw Mrs. Wyndham in the act of putting on her shawl, and Ginevra standing by her with a sterner expression in her face than he had ever seen in these fair features. Sir Charles d'Arcy was near them, and when "Mrs Wyndham's carriage stops the way," was shouted by the servants, he offered her his arm, which she took without speaking. There was another delay, and they all stood in the hall. Neville placed himself before her; but though she had seen him, and that the arm which rested on Sir Charles's trembled, she did not once again turn her eyes towards him. He bit his lips till the blood started from them; he spoke to Mrs. Wyndham in a hurried manner, and with a wild laugh. He grew almost frantic at her silence. He said between his teeth,

"You will drive me mad if you go on in this way."

Whether she heard him or not, she did not stir, and sprung into the carriage without a word or a look. It was all over then—she had finally discarded him. He had offended her beyond forgiveness, insulted and injured her, till she, the gentlest, the mildest of women, had grown to hate and to despise him. All would be over between them. She had seen how others would have loved her, and she had at last recoiled with loathing from the man who had marred her destiny, and blighted her existence. Now, what would it avail if he was to acknowledge his marriage—offer her to share the beggary of one whom she had ceased to love—confess to her proud father, that he had deceived, tortured, and injured his child, and now could offer her no reparation, but his dishonoured name and his broken fortunes? A few months ago she would have braved everything for him—would have worked, toiled, begged for him. Yes! she *had* loved him with a deep and patient love; she had borne her trials with an heroic and much enduring tenderness, but it was over now; he had drawn upon it too largely, he had dealt with it too roughly, the cord had snapped, and the spell was broken. Now, if he acknowledged his marriage, what was to become of him? Scorned by his own family and by hers, a separation would inevitably ensue; or if that religion which he had so long striven to drive out of her heart by every art which his pas-

sions suggested, and his violence carried out—if it made her pity and forgive him—what did he care for such feelings, if she did not love him? What cared he then for life with or without her? What strange visions rose before him during that night, of what might have been, had he followed the paths of truth and of honour!—what dark presentiments of what now would be the tenor of his days! He thought of her as he had seen her in her Italian home—a child in form and face—an angel of light and beauty—he thought of her as she had stood at the church door on the day of their first parting, and felt again her soft hand on his burning brow, as she had spoken of courage and of hope. Again he saw her pale face flushed with indignant surprise, or cold as the ice which the blighting north wind has fixed on the deep lake. And then, in days to come, how should he see her?—bound to himself by hateful ties, every feeling bruised, every hope withered—would she die in her youth, and go down to her grave in darkness and in sorrow?—or would she live, and fall deep, deep into the pit which his own iniquity had dug under her feet?—would her eye one day grow bold, and her brow shameless?—that pure eye, that lofty brow, that noble spirit, that spotless innocence which had won his love, and commanded his respect, through all the heavy trials of their married life. If she should ever fall into guilt, would not her fall weigh on his conscience like a damning curse, and the memory of her lost virtue haunt him to the day of his death like a menacing spectre? What could save her, he bitterly asked himself, if, hating and despising him—her husband and her betrayer—she stood in the world, with her youth, her beauty, her warm heart, and her ardent spirit, unguarded by sacred ties, unprotected from unhallowed affections, and with a life before her unbrightened by one ray of hope or of love? “What can save her?” he repeated with agony; and then he thought of her religion—her firm, ardent, uncompromising religion—that religion, against which the winds of human passion had beaten, and the waves of affliction had broken in vain—that religion, to which she had clung through the storm, and which had carried her through it with an unshaken fidelity, and an unsullied purity. He thought of her own solemn words, “Life is short, eternity long;” of her deep faith in the value of suffering; and for the first time he rejoiced that her feet were set upon a rock, far above the billows in which his own restless spirit was tossed to and fro.

After nights of sleepless thought, Neville passed days of restless

uneasiness. He went to every place where he thought it possible that Ginevra might be, but he saw her not again, and Sir Charles d'Arcy at the same time disappeared from the world. Once he saw him walking through the park, arm in arm with Colonel Leslie; and another day, as he was himself wearily pacing up and down Park Lane, with his eyes fixed on the house inhabited by his wife, he saw D'Arcy standing at the drawing-room window. Day after day he sat down to write letters to Ginevra, in which he sometimes upbraided her for her coldness—sometimes entreated her forgiveness, or offered to acknowledge his marriage, if she would promise to cling to him through all the difficulties that would ensue; but his pride revolted, his feelings recoiled from asking or accepting a sacrifice from her. Her strict sense of duty would doubtless make her agree to any self-abnegation, which such a course might require; but to accept instead of conferring an obligation—to humble himself at once before her, as well as before his injured sister, and perhaps read in her face, on the very day that he drank his cup of bitterness to the dregs, and found himself despised and condemned by the world, that same cold and stern expression with which she had parted from him, and which had haunted him ever since—the idea was intolerable, the prospect insupportable. Their positions seemed reversed and their parts exchanged. His impetuous nature writhed under the sense of her indifference, and the possibility of her love for another. It was reported in the world that she was attached to D'Arcy, and that there were only obstacles to their marriage which time might surmount. The probability of their union was often mentioned before him. Her paleness, the mournful expression of her eyes, her sudden retreat from the world, were commented upon, and Neville grew almost frantic with the fears, the doubts, the suspense, the conflicting and daily renewed agitations of such a life of misery. Sometimes he plunged into dissipation with reckless avidity; sometimes, with the hope of terrifying her into some measure of reconciliation, he displayed in the utmost his intimacy with Mrs. Fraser, and encouraged the reports which were again circulated of his approaching marriage with her. He hoped they would reach Ginevra's ears; and even if she had ceased to love him, even if she cared for another, she must be roused by the bare apprehension of so dreadful a crime, so horrible a deception. In this turmoil of passion, in this conflict of feeling, his nights and days were spent. He sometimes left London for days and weeks together, and shut himself

up occasionally in complete solitude in a villa which he had taken at Fulham.

One morning, after a night of more than usual misery, he rose with a resolution which had suddenly been formed, and which gave him calmness. He would go straight to Colonel Leslie's house, ask for Ginevra, desire to speak with her alone, put her love to the test, and his own fate in her hands. He had now nothing to fear, nothing to lose. The riches, the possessions of the world had turned to dross in his hands; the respect, the good opinion of men, were as dust in the balance. Her love, her fidelity, her pardon, were all in all henceforward, and he would put it to the test in that day to lose or win it all. With rapid steps he crossed the streets between his house and Colonel Leslie's; he drew near to it, and perceived that it was shut up. A sickening sense of disappointment oppressed him, but he hurried on and knocked at the door. A housemaid opened it; he asked where and when the family had moved.

"They are gone abroad, sir!" she answered, with a curtsey!

"Gone!" he repeated, as if scarcely understanding her.

"Yes, sir! The colonel, Mrs. Wyndham, and the young ladies. It was very sudden, sir, their going," she continued, seeing that he neither answered nor moved.

"When do they return?" he said in a hoarse voice.

"I don't know, sir."

"Where are they gone?"

"Can't tell exactly, sir! They did not seem for to know till they got to Dover if they should go through France or Belgium." He turned away.

She was gone. She had left England without making one effort to see him—without writing him one line—without making the slightest advance towards a reconciliation. It must be a settled resolution, a deep and irreconcilable hatred and contempt that possessed her—he felt it. The sea was now rolling between them, an emblem of that deep gulf of separation which had divided their hearts for this life.

"Aye, and for another too!" he exclaimed, fiercely, "for I will curse her and die. She has been cruel in her anger, and merciless in her revenge. No, I will not die," he continued, clenching his hands. "I will not die; for she would then marry that man, and forget that I had ever crossed her path—

that I had ever been anything to her but a tempter, a tyrant, and a foe!"

For hours he wandered, for hours he strove with his misery, till his rage had grown dull, and his grief hard. Towards dusk he went into a club, he took up a newspaper—among the departures for Dover, he saw the names of Colonel Leslie and of his family, and of Sir Charles d'Arcy. A cold, dark, hopeless anger took possession of his whole being. He cursed his wife, his rival, and himself. He went back to his house, at one moment resolved for ever to drive her from his mind and from his heart; at others, to pursue her—to tear her from her father's arms—overwhelm her with a torrent of reproaches—and vent, in her presence, the fury and the tenderness, the remorse and the passion, of his soul. But by degrees that fierce storm subsided, and his trust in her returned. The sacred ties which bind them will plead his cause, even in the eleventh hour of returning faith, in the last lingering light of her departing love. He thinks of other lands, of other cares, of honourable toil, of generous efforts. His imagination gradually admits new ideas—a new order of things—a new plan of life: but he has not yet dived into his own heart, or measured its deceitfulness. Jealousy and disappointment, fear and remorse, have opened his eyes; but they have not shaken to the very foundation the evil depths of his heart. If, in that hour, Ginevra had stood before him in her gentle beauty—if, in her eyes, he had seen that same meek, enduring, much-pardoning love, he had so often found there, may be the evil spirit would have returned into the chamber of his soul, with seven spirits worse than himself, and the last state of that man might have been worse than the first. But the ground is softened, the spirit is moved, and Edmund Neville is a different man from that day forth. This is the turning point in his life. If he hardens his heart now, he will soon be a villain—one of those villains who are content to despise themselves, and become indifferent to their own baseness. A few months more of hardened selfishness, a few months more of heartless deceit, and his love for Ginevra will have died away in the foul atmosphere of his degraded mind. And if she loves him still, it will be that her eyes rest on the painted sepulchre that hides from her sight the loathsome corruption within. *Will* he harden his heart? What hope is there that he will not? Will Heaven strive for ever with a man? Will God knock at the door of his heart?—knock in vain, and never depart? Does not a day come when He says to the soul, as his prophet to the guilty king

of old—"Thou shalt see my face no more!" Doubtless there are such days; but ere that last sentence goes forth, the vials of wrath are sometimes in mercy emptied, and the soul is shaken to its very foundation, and the spectres of the past rise from the tombs of memory, and the veil is rent in twain, and discloses eternity, and in the hour of nature's agony the soul surrenders to its Maker—the spirit yields to its God.

CHAPTER XVIII.

It had never been difficult to Ginevra to forgive Edmund, till the day that they had met and parted at Lady Mordaunt's breakfast. To be at once disowned and upbraided, to be driven almost wild by threats on the one hand, and by sneers on the other,—her silence insisted upon with violence at one moment, and made the very ground of suspicion on the other,—was more than even the gentlest spirit could endure; and as she drove home on that night, she was on the point of rushing to her father's room, confessing the whole truth, and calling upon him to protect and defend her against the world and against Edmund. But her conscience whispered, that she would be doing from resentment what she had not done from a sense of duty. Not that it had ever appeared to her in that light, or that she had resisted the suggestions of conscience; for, whether love and timidity had deceived her, or else that in fact she was right to try every means to obtain justice from Edmund himself, rather than extort it from him in the face of an hostile world and an indignant family, she had hitherto pursued her course in the strong conviction of acting rightly, in the firm belief that she had sacrificed nothing but her own peace of mind—her own happiness—to him whose honour and welfare were dearer to her than life. Still, if it had never been her duty before, his injustice and harshness did not make it one now, and she reproached herself for the passing impulse which had prompted her to an act which passion, and not principle, had suggested. Margaret seemed involuntarily relieved when she returned, and held her cold hands within hers, with more than usual tenderness. It was late, and the weather had grown somewhat chilly. Colonel Leslie was sitting by a bright sparkling wood fire which had just been lit. Ginevra placed herself near him and then laid her aching head against his chair, as if unable to bear its weight. He gently raised it, and pressed it against his breast. The long dark eye-lashes were resting on the marble cheeks, on which the light of the fire threw a slight reflection, and every vein in the transparent forehead was discernible. She had removed her

bonnet, and her comb falling at the same time, the masses of her fair hair rolled over his arms. She was very beautiful in that attitude, but there was something about her face that made her father and her sister uneasy. He looked at Margaret and shook his head; she burst into tears. Ginevra suddenly opened her eyes, and looked from one to the other with a frightened expression. She glanced anxiously at Margaret, and began to talk with a forced gaiety. The clock struck twelve, and Colonel Leslie wished both his daughters good night. He kissed Margaret on the forehead, he pressed Ginevra to his heart, and they withdrew. The sisters slept in two rooms next each other, the doors were open between them, and Margaret sat reading in hers, while she watched for the measured breathing which would indicate that Ginevra was asleep. She saw the light extinguished, and all was still, except that now and then a low suppressed moan seemed to reveal some kind of suffering. Gently, and with her lamp shaded by her hand, she advanced towards the foot of her sister's bed. The unnatural brightness of her eyes startled her. Ginevra made an almost joyful exclamation when she saw her, and beckoned her to her side. Margaret placed the lamp on the floor, and sat down on the edge of the bed. The hand that rested on hers was burning hot, and her cheeks, that were so pale an hour before, were glowing like fire.

"Margaret," she said at last, raising herself in her bed, and looking steadily in her eyes, "I am so glad you have come to me, for I should not have slept to-night if you had not, and I do want to sleep, Margaret, my head aches so much. I got frightened down stairs, when I saw that my father was looking at you, and that you were crying. I felt it was about me, and it made me afraid."

"Afraid of us, Ginevra!" Margaret said in a soothing tone.

"Afraid of what might happen," she answered hurriedly; "afraid of to-night—to-morrow. Listen to me, Margaret. You think I am ill, don't you? You are uneasy about me? O, my sister, shall I tell you what terrifies me—what makes me ill? It is the fear that pity and kindness will make you reveal what pity and kindness have hitherto made you hide. Margaret, it would kill me if you did. It kills me to think you will."

She grasped her sister's hands, who maintained a grave and painful silence.

Ginevra became pale again, and said with great agitation,

"You will break my father's heart, and mine too, if you speak to him."

“Will the time come when you will speak yourself, Ginevra?”

She paused a moment, and then said earnestly,

“I must pause, and in solitude question my own thoughts, before I can answer you. But this rest assured of, Margaret, that you cannot be wrong in trusting me.”

“Aye! *you*, but not *others*!” Margaret exclaimed, while her eyes flashed with indignation. “You are dying by my side, and you hold me back when I would save you.”

“Sister, I know not what you think,” Ginevra rejoined, “but this you may believe. There is no safety for me but in following what I believe to be my duty, and in sparing my father a trial which might kill us both. How much or how little you know of me and of my history, I know not,—perhaps I may never know; but this much I will tell you: The crisis of my fate is approaching, and, as I said before, it is in prayer and in solitude that I must meet it. Doubts have risen in my mind which never rose there before, and I seem to have lost the track which, narrow as it was, once appeared so clear. When this happens to a Catholic, Margaret, this is what he does. For awhile, if he may, he withdraws from this perplexing world, and communes in deep silence with his own soul and with God. In one of those calm retreats where the light of eternity shines on the paths of this life, and the still, small voice of conscience is discerned by the hushed spirit—he listens to that solemn message, and returns to the world like Moses from the mount, ready to break the idol, or to offer the sacrifice that Heaven requires. This is what I am about to do: far from those I love and those I fear, alone with my God, and those who speak in His name and with His power, prostrate at the foot of the cross, I will ask in deep humility what He will have me to do, and *that*, so help me Heaven, *I will* do, though it should be——sister, what I have prayed against from my childhood upwards, to bring misery on those I love, and pour fresh bitterness into a cup already but too full. Now, dearest, go and sleep; and if in the night you wake with tears in yours eyes, remember that they are blessed, for you have wept to-night with one who weeps.”

“Sister, good night,” Margaret murmured; and then she threw her arms round Ginevra’s neck, and kissed her with all the fervency of the affection which filled her heart, and then returned again to smile upon her, while tears gushed from her eyes; and then, when those wearied eyes were closed with fatigue, she gently fanned the glowing cheeks till their crimson hue subsided; but she started

and hurried away like a frightened child, when, in the midst of the broken murmurs of the sleeper, the name of Edmund passed the fevered lips, and was repeated with a heart-rending accent, which sent the watcher to her own room, pale and trembling with a nameless fear.

Ginevra was better the next day, but unequal to any exertion, and she seemed now to dread as much going into society as at one time she had appeared to seek it. Mrs. Wyndham had imparted to her brother, with many expressions of surprise, annoyance, and almost indignation, the refusal which Sir Charles d'Arcy's proposals had met with. When he was made acquainted with it, he immediately connected with that circumstance Ginevra's emotion on her return from Rosewood, and the subsequent evident alteration in her spirits, and conjectured that she had sacrificed her inclinations, either to some scrupulous sense of duty, or, perhaps, from a mistaken idea that she was called to a monastic life. But when he broached the subject to herself, the calm decision of her manner seemed to remove such an idea; and the solemn assurance she gave him, that though desirous of making a temporary retreat in a religious house near London, which she named, that she had no vocation for the cloister, and no intention of embracing a religious life, satisfied him on that point, though it still left him at a loss to account for the evident depression of her spirits. Early in the morning she would ask Margaret to go with her to Kensington Gardens, and remain an hour or two sitting in the shade, or, if the sun was not very hot, basking in the sunshine: for an unnatural chilliness seemed to affect her; her step grew every day more languid, and her voice more feeble. She sometimes asked Margaret to read to her, and generally chose such books and passages as spoke of sufferings endured and sacrifices made for conscience sake. Sometimes she tried to read herself; but her cheek flushed, and her hands trembled too much, and she gave it up after going through a page or two. Yet all the time she was not ill, or did not acknowledge herself so. She fixed on a day for her removal to the convent at—, and Margaret, who, since their conversation on the night after the breakfast at Rosewood, had connected this retreat with the final solution of her sister's destiny, heard it proposed and assented to with a mixture of nervousness and satisfaction. She also thought it might be good for her health, which was evidently failing in a way which no physician could understand or prescribe for. She had often witnessed the extraordinary effect which religious services

and places seemed to have on Ginevra's spirits, and wondered at, without quite understanding that power. Often and often she had seen her weep in solitude, and only find relief at the foot of the altar; and rejoiced that for awhile she was to be within constant reach of that little quiet chapel where a lamp burned by day and by night, and at stated hours the solemn accents of prayer arose from prostrate worshippers. She could imagine how soothing would be to her this unwearied round of service in that humble dome, and almost longed (though she could not on many points believe like Ginevra) that she might share for a while her retreat from the glare and turmoil of life. Perhaps she needed it as well as her sister. She was not as calm, as tranquil, as she ought to have been. Oh, what a weary, restless, breathless thing you this! How few can lie or rest on their oars, even for a few days, while youth is still at the prow, and pleasure at the helm!

One day that Ginevra seemed less fatigued than usual, her father persuaded her to go and dine with a friend of his, who had a villa in the Regent's Park. There was to be some music in the evening, and he pressed her very much to make the exertion. She consented, for Margaret was engaged elsewhere, and she saw how anxious Colonel Leslie was that she should go. Mr. Elvers was a lawyer of great reputation, and his house was very much frequented by old judges and young barristers. The society at dinner that day was almost entirely legal, and Ginevra sat at dinner between a learned member of the bench and a young man who had been just called to the bar. It was refreshing to her to see a set of wholly new faces, to hear no allusions to the set of persons with whom she had recently associated, and she conversed with her neighbours with more ease and cheerfulness than she had experienced for some time past. There are moments of strange relief to all suffering, mental as well as physical, and this Ginevra now experienced. One of her neighbours interested her very much by accounts of various strange trials, which had come under his notice during a late circuit, and her earnest attention and intelligent remarks rivetted him to her side during the rest of the evening. She was sitting by the window, and two or three other persons joined her and her new friend, and the conversation became general. After discussing with some animation a case of poisoning, they adverted to the subject of a disputed property in the county of Essex, and Mr. Ausdon, Ginevra's new acquaintance, eagerly maintained, that under the terms of the will, on which the question turned, there could be no doubt

of what the verdict would be. Some one questioned that the words were correctly quoted, and in support of his superior acquaintance with the exact tenor of the will, he mentioned that he had been to examine it at Doctors' Commons, "where, by the way," he added, "I read through that strange will of one of the Nevilles of Clantoy."

"What will?" asked Mr. Ausdon.

"That will by which the only son is disinherited if he marries a Catholic."

"So much for Protestant liberality," said Mr. Ausdon.

"O! on that score," replied the other, "the Papists themselves have no right to complain."

A young man, who had not yet spoken, passed his hands through his hair, gazed at the opposite looking-glass, and said,

"O! I know that Neville; the son, I mean; he is a capital fellow, but very extravagant. He ran through as many thousands as he had lived years, before he came to the estate. It was reported that he had married a Catholic abroad."

"What did he do with his wife, then—burked her somewhere, or gagged her?" said Mr. Ausdon.

"No, no; upon my word, that's all nonsense. I have known him all my life. He would not do a shabby thing."

"Shabby!" said the gentleman who had seen the will; "you might as well call a man's picking your pocket shabby. It would be a downright fraud."

"Why, it serves his father's purpose if the Catholic wife is suppressed."

"But there is a sister, my dear sir; a sister, whose right to the estate would, in that case, be good in law, though you may think it founded on a most abominable injustice."

"O, there is a sister in the case, is there? A Miss, or a Mrs. somebody?"

"Miss Neville; a very amiable person, I am told, who will be well worth looking after if this invisible wife should ever turn up."

"Well, I declare, I think it would be too much to expect of him that he should ruin himself by acknowledging his marriage; but, if it really is true, how he must have bullied the wife to keep her quiet!"

Mr. Ausdon looked rather contemptuously at the last speaker, and, turning to Ginevra, said,

"Can you imagine, or excuse a man, keeping such a secret under such circumstances?"

It was impossible to her to speak; she turned abruptly away, and at that moment the first notes of a loud bravura interrupted the conversation, and with her arm resting on the back of the pianoforte, her head on her hand, and her eyes fixed on the singers, as if she was rivetted by their performance, she revolved in her mind the new impression which that hour had conveyed to her mind.

"A fraud! a fraud!" she repeated to herself, as if weighing the value, the meaning of that impression. "His sister defrauded. His name disgraced. Oh, those words! I understand them now—Silence! ruin! dishonour! Lost if I speak, aye, and lost if I do not speak! Debts, difficulties! I to overwhelm him, I to denounce him, I who would die for him! Oh! how art thou fallen, my beloved, my Edmund! His trial has been great. Would to God I had died! Heaven forgive me, I never said so before; but a fraud! a crime! Oh, I cannot sit here and think of it, and not grow wild with the thought: and he is gone, gone! I cannot find him, I cannot find him. I know not where to find him, and I am getting so ill, my brain at times feels so confused. If I write and others open my letter, they will know, they will discover——: and I too have been silent, I have helped to defraud his sister—his sister. Edmund's sister, could I but see you, could I go to you! And what shall I say? That Edmund, my Edmund—O, he has told me so, he has not deceived me there. If I speak he will fly from me; he will go for ever, for ever. And what am I that I should be his judge?—that I should drive him to despair! No, but at his feet I can lie, and not let him go till he has cast to the winds all worldly fears, all worldly wealth, and from that shipwreck saved nothing but his honour and my love. Then we my fly together, then we may——"

At that moment Colonel Leslie touched her on the shoulder, and she perceived that the song had been long ended, and that the company was dispersing. From that day she seemed to grow much stronger; she became less pale than she had lately been. There was usually now a bright colour in her cheek, and she took a great deal of exercise again. At all hours of the day she walked or drove, and Margaret observed that she watched continually, with a kind of feverish anxiety, all the groups of horsemen that they passed; that she often stretched her head out of the carriage to look down a street, as if she would pierce the distance in search of some object;

that she set out on their daily drive with a heightened colour, and returned to her room at its conclusion jaded and exhausted, and that once or twice she had been out alone in the morning. On these occasions she had gone to Mivart's Hotel, where Edmund usually staid when in town, and found that he was still in the country, and had not named any day for his return. Since she had learned the real cause of the secrecy which he had observed and imposed upon her, she felt resolved to procure at all cost another interview with him, and not to leave him till she had obtained what now was no longer a boon to herself, but an imperative claim, which in the name of honour, of truth, and of justice, she must plead, and if she failed—her brow contracted with anguish, but her *will* was firm—she would then speak out herself, unless Heaven in its mercy sent her death before that day.

On her second inquiry at the hotel, she found that Edmund was expected there in about three weeks' time; and on that period she fixed all her thoughts and feelings—all the intensity of her hopes and her fears. About a fortnight before this epoch, she found one morning her father and her sister reading a letter, which had appeared to affect them painfully, and which was placed in her hands, while Colonel Leslie stood musing, with his back to the fire, in a thoughtful attitude, and Margaret sat gazing on the park with a mournful expression of countenance. It was from Walter Sydney; he had left Paris a short time before, and had proceeded with young Wyndham to Switzerland, intending to return home by the Rhine, while his companion proceeded to Italy. But, at a small town near the Lake of Lucerne, the latter had been seized with a violent attack of illness, which presented such alarming symptoms, that Walter, who had summoned the best medical assistance the neighbourhood could afford, was obliged, after consulting with the doctors, to write home, and request that Colonel Leslie would break to his poor sister the fearful intelligence, and urge her to set off at once, if she wished to see her son once more. He immediately felt that it would be impossible to let her go alone, and he resolved to accompany her as a matter of course. His only doubt was about his daughters. He felt a strong desire to take them both abroad, but he was afraid that Ginevra, in her delicate state of health, would not be equal to the fatiguing day and night journey which they would have to perform, and he therefore yielded without difficulty to her desire of accomplishing her retreat in the Convent of—where she was, at all events, to have gone in a few days. To

Margaret he left the choice between this hurried and melancholy journey, and a visit to her grandmother, at Grantley, which had been for some time in contemplation. He proceeded himself with a heavy heart to carry the intelligence which was to turn the thoughtless gaiety of his poor sister into the bitterest grief that human nature can know—the greatest trial it can experience; to say, “He whom thou lovest is suffering—he who is far from thee is dying,” and to carry her through the scenes of this busy world and its unsympathising surface of beauty, of business, of sunshine, and of shade; a throbbing heart whose every pulsation is pain—to which every bright ray of light is a mockery, and each human face it meets, a careless witness of its speechless woe.

Margaret sat at the window with her eyes fixed on Walter’s letter, and, overcome by some sudden emotion, she pressed it to her heart. What that emotion was, it would have been difficult for herself to define. That she was agitated was certain, and differently from what the news of the dangerous illness of her cousin would have accounted for. The troubled expression of her dark blue eyes spoke not merely of grief or sympathy, but of perplexity. Had she been playing with edgetools, and while Frederic Vincent and herself had been seeking to unravel the secret that hung over her sister’s destiny, had her heart or her vanity imperceptibly betrayed her? How this strange confidence between them had sprung up, neither could scarcely have said. Vincent had known, since the days when he and his family had been at Genoa, that there was an acquaintance between Ginevra and Neville. He had strongly suspected, the day that Maud and himself had surprised her in conversation with a stranger, who that stranger was; but his knowledge of his sister Maud’s spiteful disposition, and of her peculiar antipathy to Miss Leslie, had induced him altogether to suppress his suspicions. Subsequent circumstances confirmed his belief, and since his return to England, he had watched with interest the indications which seemed to throw light on the subject. The words he had heard Margaret mutter, on the night of Lady Tyrrel’s party, (about Edmund’s *acting* more parts than one,) suggested the idea that she suspected him of double dealing with regard to her sister and herself; and almost involuntarily that night he touched upon the subject, and asked her if she had any reason to suppose that Edmund and Ginevra had been acquainted in Italy. She was taken by surprise, and he immediately saw by her countenance that the idea was not new to her. Having been friends from childhood, Margaret

was disposed, at all times, to treat him with confidence, and she knew him to be honourable and high-minded, to a degree which inspired her, in this particular instance, with a strong reliance on the correctness of his judgment, and the delicacy of his feelings. She told him the incident of the picture, which, joined to his own impression, amounting almost to conviction, that Edmund was the stranger who was wont to hover round the Palazzo——, furnished what seemed to both their minds irresistible evidence of the fact. To Margaret, this conviction was most acceptable; for although to no human being, and certainly not to Vincent, would she have breathed a word of that part of the affair which weighed most heavily and painfully on her own heart—the interview between Edmund and her sister on the morning of his departure from Grantley—still even that circumstance would assume a different character, if it should turn out to have been the parting of affianced lovers, bound to each other by the most solemn ties, and not the revolting act of a vulgar intrigue, the result of a sudden acquaintance, and a brief flirtation.

To find out the cause and the excuse for such an extraordinary course of deception, and the nature of the obstacles which thwarted such an attachment, if it really did exist, was her most ardent desire; and Vincent, who had heard some vague rumours of the tenor of Mr. Neville's will, which hitherto had been little spoken of out of the circle of his family connexions and neighbours, employed himself to investigate the truth of those reports. When he had ascertained that the late Mr. Neville's prejudices had been such as might have deterred his son, even before his death, from avowing such an attachment, and an engagement to a Catholic, much light seemed thrown on the subject, and deep and long were the conferences between Margaret, Vincent, and his sister Lucy, on the probabilities that such invincible difficulties would put an end to an engagement which they concluded must have subsisted, if it did not still subsist; or on the possibility that by an heroic sacrifice Neville would renounce his fortune and claim his bride. To this hope Margaret clung, for she saw, in her sister's declining health, how deeply disappointment and suspense were weighing her down, and she did not sufficiently estimate the difficulties in the way of such a sacrifice, both from the nature of the case and the nature of Edmund's character. The real truth never even glanced across her mind. That any man could have so treated Ginevra, or that Ginevra could have commanded her feelings under such trials, would have seemed

to her a gross impossibility. As it was, she would scarcely allow the causes which Vincent urged in his behalf; and she looked so very pretty, when with a heightened colour and a curling lip she expressed her utter contempt for the world, and its riches, and its pomps, which, nevertheless, no one more comfortably indulged in, that Vincent often reverted to the subject only to call forth that indignant expression and eloquent scorn. During all this time it was quite natural that Margaret should have no greater interest than in conversing with Frederic Vincent. A common interest, a subject that we talk of to one or two persons, and never allude to in the presence of others, is one of the strongest possible links between people, and the *regard d'intelligence*, which passes like an electric flash from one to another, opens sometimes a new page in the life of both. But Margaret loved Walter, dearly she loved him, and not a thought that he might not have known passed through her mind the while; when she received his letter, written on the morning of his departure for Paris, she felt only provoked with him for having misunderstood her words, and misinterpreted her conduct, and with herself for having given rise to his suspicions; and when she wrote to him, it was with all the frankness which had ever marked her words and actions: but the truth is, that Walter ought no to have sent that letter. It certainly opened her eyes to the fact, that whatever her own might be, Frederic Vincent's feelings towards herself were of a very different nature from those of mere friendship, and it was not in Margaret's disposition to remain perfectly unmoved by such a discovery. She was easily excited by the admiration of others, and could scarcely resist the temptation of ascertaining how far it extended, and of indulging herself in those minor agitations of life which are so agreeable to those whose minds require a stimulus for which they too often draw upon their heart, draining it of his highest emotions to supply the fancy and the waywardness of the passing hour.

She felt bound to take care that Frederic did not fall in love with her. He did not know that she was engaged, and it would be so hard upon him. Perhaps she ought to tell him. How would he feel? How would he look, when informed that she was (she stopped, for she was going to say *in love*) that she was attached to Walter? She met him the next day, and her manner was altered. Vincent remarked it, and he looked so low—so kind, but so low—that she felt quite unhappy. Lucy, too, spoke very pointedly about her brother; and Maud shruggeld her shoulders, and talked of caprice.

Perhaps Margaret might have written a different letter that day, but the other was gone. Three days later, she had told herself that to be ungracious to Frederic was very unjust, and that nothing would have a greater appearance of coquetry than a change of manner; that the plan was, to be always steadily friendly, and kindly courteous; and therefore, in order not to change, she became very courteous and very friendly again. She bungled sadly, and Frederic began to speak as lovers speak, and she to listen with pleasure, and to wish that he might propose and have done with it, and that she might tell him the truth. That her affections were engaged—was that the *truth*? Conscience whispered, “It *shall* be the truth.” Something answered—whether it was conscience answering itself, it would be difficult to say—but certain it is, that during the next few days, conscience asked a great many questions: whether it always got answers, is not so certain. And now Margaret is sitting at the window, and gazing on Hyde Park; but she is thinking of another park, and of the choice which her father has given her. She has just found out that in this autumnal weather the shades of Grantley would be delightful. Her own Arabian pony to ride, her own sweet flower-garden to tend, her own bright river to gaze upon, and her grandfather and her grandmother to see again, and the parsonage, and Heron Castle—she stopped, another castle is in her mind—Donnington Castle rises to her view too plainly. There is no self-deception possible here. Margaret is herself again.

“Away with these visions!” she exclaims. “Away with these false suggestions! Whatever happens, whatever be the distant duty, there is a clear one now—to leave all other thoughts behind—to go to him, the dearest and the best friend I have—to see him once more, and then away from all this life of excitement—once more by his side, find out if all this has been a feverish dream, or a sad reality.”

To this noble resolution was adjoined one of those strange little colloquies with oneself, which are very disturbing when we wish to be heroes (not to our valets or maids, but) to ourselves—“It would be so very ridiculous to have liked three people in one year.” And then there was a little, faint, distant, scarcely-perceptible whisper, from some corner of the brain, that suggested—“But am I now, or have I ever been, really in love?” This was so very faint, that perhaps she did not hear it herself.

In a few hours Colonel Leslie, Margaret, and Mrs. Windham

were on their road to Dover; the first two having previously accompanied Ginevra to the Convent at——, where their parting took place. The two sisters, locked in each other's embrace, seemed hardly able to speak. Their separation was to last but a few weeks, but both felt that those few weeks might prove the most important in their lives; and each was mentally praying for the other as they said farewell. Once more Ginevra threw her arms round Colonel Leslie's neck—once more pressed Margaret to her heart, and then gliding into the chapel, fell on her knees, and remained there for some hours.

When she entered her little room, its simple arrangement, and its various religious ornaments, reminded her of her Italian home; and the sacred Litanies chanted by the nuns—the same which, from her infancy upwards, she had loved to join in, wherever a humble choir of wandering peasants, or of home-bound children, recited them before some wayside image of the Blessed Virgin—carried her back to the days of her childhood, and awoke in her heart a fervent gratitude, that her faith had made no shipwreck in the midst of the storms which had beset it. Who can describe what the language of the Church is to a Catholic—the type of its universality, the badge of its unity? That voice, reaching unto all lands, and speaking to all hearts! uttering the same well-known accents in the gorgeous temples of the south, and the Gothic shrines of the north, as in the rustic chapel or in the mountain cave, where persecuted worshippers meet in secret. At every altar, in every sanctuary, each sacred rite and solemn hour claim the words of sacred import, which fall on the ear of the stranger and the wanderer, at once as a whisper from his home, and a melody of Heaven.

Ginevra's eyes filled with tears as she joined in the well-known responses, but they were tears that relieved the heart and brain; not like some that she had shed a few days before, when each scalding drop seemed to record the disgrace of one she loved, and whose name she must one day bear in sorrow or in joy, in honour or in shame.

CHAPTER XIX.

After a rapid journey through France and Switzerland, Colonel Leslie, with his sister and Margaret, were drawing near to the small village on the Lake of Lucerne, whence Walter had written the account which had hurried them abroad. Mrs. Wyndham, after wearing herself out with watching and restless talking to her companions, had at last sunk into a state of exhaustion, and stretched upon the sofa of the cabin, in the small steamer in which they were crossing the lake, remained silently gazing on the coast which they were skirting, and at whose different points they occasionally stopped to take up passengers. Margaret was sitting alone at one end of the deck, with a book in her hand, but with her eyes wandering over the blue waters and the magnificent outline of the snow-crested mountains. She, too, was tired, but more in mind than in body. Not only was she impatient to arrive, on her young cousin's account, but she longed also to clear her own mind and heart from the clouds which were obscuring them. She did not understand herself, and this tormenting sensation made her anxious for some change which would throw a light on her own feelings. She looked back with little pleasure to the last weeks she had spent in London, and would not for worlds have returned to that life of excitement and dissipation; and though she often thought of Frederic Vincent, that thought was connected with something painful which she could hardly explain to herself. Perhaps, during those long hours of meditation which travelling affords, and in which we have such ample time to look back as well as forward, she may have discovered some secret about her own character which had hitherto escaped her. It is not unusual for persons who are conscious of possessing certain good qualities with which certain defects have an apparent inconsistency, to conclude at once that they cannot be liable to the latter, or in any danger of falling into them. Because Margaret was not frivolous in one sense of the word—because her tastes were intellectual, and her character earnest—she had never suspected herself of a tendency to levity,

which was, nevertheless, a predominating feature in her mind, though it did not extend to her heart. What excited and interested her at the moment, whether subject, pursuit, or person, acquired an engrossing importance in her estimation, and exercised an almost absolute sway over the deeper feelings and real sympathies of her nature. This sort of disposition, when it is united to great truthfulness of character and honesty of purpose, is often very harassing to its possessors. They learn only by slow degrees to judge their own impressions, to distinguish what is genuine from what is spurious, and from the worthless chaff of emotions hastily called forth and as hastily subsiding, to draw the grain of real value which alone can insure a harvest of happiness. This discriminating power is seldom acquired in early youth, and if the faint dawn of this truth was breaking upon Margaret's mind, while gazing on the blue waters of the Lake of Lucerne, it had scarcely yet assumed a distinct form, even in the secret contemplations of her own mind.

As the steamer approached the small jutting pier of the town of Weggis, Margaret sought eagerly for Walter's figure among the crowd which was awaiting its arrival ; and when she saw him leaning against the post to which the rope was fastened, her heart beat quickly as she thought of her poor aunt, and she looked anxiously at her father. At last the vessel touched the shore, and Walter sprang forward. The words "All right"—those very English words—conveyed to them at once all that they longed to hear. They flew from his lips to Margaret's as she rushed into the cabin, and carried the news to the poor mother, who had sat for the last two hours with her head buried in the cushions of her couch, unable to contend with, or to endure, the suspense which a moment of dreadful or delightful certainty was soon to terminate. Young Wyndham was recovering surely, though slowly, and words cannot paint the ecstasies of his mother as she clasped him in her arms, or the transports of gratitude with which she thanked Walter for his care of her child—for the patient kindness with which he had watched over him at the risk of catching, himself, the contagious fever which was endangering his life. Young Wyndham spoke of Walter with tears in his eyes, and Margaret had never felt so fond of her cousin as at that moment. She thought of Walter's goodness—of the love and respect which he inspired to all who approached him ; and her ever busy imagination began to conjure up a picture of his happiness, if, confirming by her words the import of her letter, she renewed an engagement which she had never

really intended to break off. She could not conceal from herself that she had felt some pleasure in Frederic Vincent's society—that his evident attachment to herself had pleased her fancy, if it had not touched her heart; but at the same time Margaret could not endure not to respect herself, and she was conscious that to prefer Frederic to Walter would be to lower herself in her own eyes; for never had she for an instant doubted the superiority of Sydney's principles, character, and understanding. Vincent was amiable and intelligent, but in the scale of moral excellence, and of intellectual attainments, the distance between them was immense. Margaret was too clever not to see it, too candid not to admit it. Still she was aware that Walter's presence, though it made her happy, did not produce, in her mind, any particular emotion. There was nothing disturbing or exciting in their intercourse, and she doubted whether love was consistent with so calm a state of feeling. 'Tis strange how many thoughts can pass through our minds in the course of a few minutes. All these reflections had occurred to Margaret during the short time that she sat by her cousin's couch. When she opened the window of her bed-room, where she had gone to dress for an early dinner, it was with intense pleasure that she gazed on the beautiful landscape before her. The shadows of the mountains were falling on the deep waters of the lake; their snowy crests were bathed in rosy light, while a dark shade rested against their slanting sides. A gentle breeze stirred to and fro the branches of the walnut-trees that stood before the rustic inn where they lodged. It swelled the sails of a vessel which was skimming over the smooth surface, like a bird on the wing; for some time it kept near the shore, emerging from darkness into light, according to the height and the breadth of the mountains which it passed; the setting sun was shedding a pathway of light on the liquid expanse, and towards that radiant road the little skiff seemed to advance. Margaret watched its progress with that fanciful interest which we sometimes attach to inanimate objects, connecting their destiny with our own in a kind of half poetical and half superstitious manner. She longed to see it follow the bright track beyond, and trembled lest that glory should die away ere it was reached. She saw the bark enter that path of flashing foam and disappear in the distance as if absorbed in the light that had received it, and Margaret raised her eyes to the serene skies above her head and rejoiced that in an hour of excitement she had not acted on an impulse which her heart would have disowned. She

remembered that in proportion as every highest principle and every purest emotion of her mind had free play, her affection for Walter had deepened and increased, and that it had only diminished when vanity and worldliness had thrown a blight on her feelings. Her manner to him when they met again was gentle and affectionate, but there was something in his which checked the levity with which she had been in the habit of addressing him. He treated her with the utmost deference and kindness; but there was an involuntary embarrassment in their intercourse and a restraint in their conversations. She wished to speak to him as in other days with all the frankness which was natural to her; but an invisible barrier seemed to stand between them, and every effort she made to surmount it only convinced her of its existence. His affection was now evinced by a grave, calm interest in her happiness, and a marked attention to her wishes, which resembled neither the affectionate familiarity with which he had been wont to address her in the days of happy childhood or thoughtless girlhood, nor the tenderness which had marked his manner during the brief period of their engagement. He never made the slightest allusion to their recent correspondence, or to their future plans, except that he occasionally spoke in a way which indicated how entirely at an end he considered that engagement.

Margaret was deeply vexed at this conduct on his part. It seemed as if her assurances had been disbelieved, and her explanations disregarded. She felt herself not released, but rejected; her annoyance from this impression was increased by the difficulty she felt in doing anything to remove the error which had evidently taken possession of his mind. She could not but remember that it was herself who had originally proposed to marry Walter; a step which nothing could justify but reliance on his boundless affection, and the consciousness that he would never have supposed that she liked him without such encouragement on her part, as, under other circumstances, it would have been unbecoming to offer. He had, doubtless, evinced the utmost joy and gratitude for the precious gift thus bestowed upon him; but, at the same time, he had shown himself keenly alive to the slightest appearance of levity in her conduct. He had accused her, on insufficient and inconclusive grounds, of being attached to another; he had given her up without an instant's hesitation, and after she had denied the charge, and renewed her assurances of attachment to himself, he still persisted in a tacit withdrawal of his claims. She was stung to the quick by

this mode of proceeding ; her proud and warm temper was thoroughly roused, and her own manner grew every day haughtier and colder. His never altered, and in the midst of her irritation she could not help admiring the perfection of his character. He remarked her uneasiness, but entirely mistaking its cause, his very efforts to remove it only served to increase her wretchedness. He thought that she reproached herself for her fickleness, and he endeavoured to reconcile her with her own conscience, by his cheerful acquiescence in their present position, and expressions of interest in her future happiness with another, which he often pointedly alluded to. That he could do so with a calm voice and serene countenance, exasperated instead of touching her, and her offended pride would not allow her to disclaim the sentiment he ascribed to her.

Owing to the slow recovery of young Wyndham, their stay near the Lake of Lucerne was for some time protracted, and Colonel Leslie, Margaret, and Walter, made several excursions in the neighbourhood. Her delight in the beauties of nature, and the singular loveliness of the scenery they visited, would have made this a season of great enjoyment, if the moral harmony of her spirits had been in unison with that of the visible world which she so ardently admired ; but there were storms in Margaret's breast which rose as suddenly, but did not disperse as quickly, as those that gathered on the Righi, and when she looked at the foaming and capricious torrents discharging their clear, though restless waters into the quiet bosom of the deep lake, she thought that Walter might thus have taken her to his heart, with all her faults and her waywardness, and there given her a refuge from the strife of her own spirit.

One day that she had felt particularly wearied with these struggles with herself, and had been painfully disturbed at hearing Walter project a journey to the Holy Land, which he intended in the course of a few months to undertake, she was mounting her mule at the door of the inn. As he was examining with care the trappings of her saddle, he said in a low voice,

"How often I shall think of these excursions, Margaret, when I ride alone through the desert."

She did not answer at first, but after advancing a few steps, she said hastily,

"Your enjoyment will be so perfect, that no recollections will disturb it."

"There are certainly," he replied, "associations connected with

the spots I hope to visit, which may well serve to divert the mind from its own sorrows, if, at least—”

“If at least you *had* any sorrows!” Margaret impatiently suggested.

He thought she was annoyed at this hint of a regret on his part, and forced a smile as he replied,

“I see you will not allow me any sorrows, Margaret. Well, I think you are right; with so much to make me happy and grateful, in the lot which is assigned to me, it is wrong to talk in such a strain.”

She bit her lip, and they proceeded in silence.

Colonel Leslie asked Walter some question, which drew him to his side, and as they ascended the winding mountain path, they went on conversing together, and she remained alone behind. When the mind is disposed to irritation, it is strange what slight circumstances will produce or keep it up. Margaret felt herself neglected; her thoughts recurred to Frederic Vincent, and she contrasted his devotion to her with what she termed Walter's indifference. Her eyes filled with tears while she repeated to herself, that after all, she would do well to marry a person of her own age, and one who had not known her too well as a child to care much for her as a woman—that it was better to marry a man who would look up to her, and be influenced by her understanding, than one who would always consider himself so infinitely her superior. “And so he is,” Conscience whispered. “No, he is not,” Temper answered; “it is neither wise nor good to disbelieve me when I tell him I like him, and to persist in forcing Frederic Vincent upon me, only because I flirted with him for a few days.” But Conscience answered again—“When you thought yourself secure of Walter's affection, you trifled with it, and gratified your fancy with another image and another interest.” The truth was, that although well acquainted with the admirable qualities of his heart, she had not yet appreciated the full strength of his character, or anticipated with what firmness he would meet a change in their relative positions. It was this discovery, which, while it deepened and exalted her attachment, added to it the poignant regret with which we look back to a blessing justly forfeited; for she was too sincere not to admit to herself, that although Walter should have answered her letter, even if it had been to question its assertions, she had for one short moment felt the wish to be released from an engagement which stood in the way of the amusement of the hour.

It was this consciousness that deterred her from explaining to him the circumstances which had at first accounted for her intimacy with Vincent. She could not, in the face of Walter's indifference, venture an allusion to the conflicting nature of her own feelings at the period that immediately followed their correspondence, or to the wonder and regret with which she looked back to them now. But it was vain to speculate on what might have been; for whether Walter had at any time loved her more than as a child or a play-thing—whether she had ever had a strong hold on his affections—it was evident that he now felt nothing for her, but that affectionate regard which he had shown her from childhood, and would show her as long as they lived. Whatever might be in future her line of conduct with respect to others, she could anticipate no renewal on his part of a state of things that had passed away so completely that it seemed never to have existed. Margaret had not calculated on the pain that this would cause her. While secure of Walter's attachment, she might have doubted the strength of her own. She had amused herself with all the little circumstances and alternatives of a flirtation—she would, perhaps, have advanced to the very brink of a marriage with another, and pursued her heedless-course with the confidence of a child in leading-strings, as long as in the midst of her own faults and inconsistencies she felt him to be at hand, ready to guard and support her; but when that sense of protection was withdrawn, and she foresaw the moment when he would leave her for years, a vivid perception of the extent of her loss took possession of her mind, and she felt overwhelmed with the prospect of her future loneliness. Several days passed in this way, and Walter, grieved at the paleness of her cheek, and the alternate dejection and irritation of her manner, was led to fear that she had given her heart to Vincent without having received any assurance of a reciprocal attachment. To have seen her happy with another would have been a trial to human nature; but to witness her sufferings and to feel himself powerless to console her, was, to Walter's peculiar character, a harder one still. The kindness and gentleness of his own manner increased every day; but at the same time it marked, in a way that could not be mistaken, how entirely he had ceased looking forward to any ties between them but those of friendship.

One morning that letters were brought to the breakfast-table, he observed Margaret receive one which she hastily put aside, without showing it to her father. As soon as it was possible, she

withdrew to her own room, and remained alone during the greatest part of the day. When she appeared at dinner, there were traces of tears in her face, and her countenance was more than usually thoughtful. As Walter passed a table where the letters were habitually laid in readiness for the servant who carried them to the post-office, he saw one in Margaret's handwriting, addressed to Frederic Vincent, and directed to Baden-Baden. He sighed deeply, and did not feel all the satisfaction he would have expected to derive from this proof, that some communication existed between them, and at the impression it conveyed to him, that her inequality of spirits was the result not of harassing uncertainty, but merely of her separation from the object of her affections. He was grieved that Margaret did not treat him with confidence; but though he would readily have entered on the subject if she had begun it, he did not feel courage to advert to it in the first instance, and thus the estrangement between them deepened every hour. The time arrived at last when young Wyndham was pronounced sufficiently recovered to pursue their journey homeward; and, leaving the neighbourhood of Lucerne, they proceeded towards Germany. At Basle, where they stopped for one night, a packet of letters was lying for them at the inn. One of them was from a cousin of Walter's, who was spending the summer at Baden, and who was anxious to see him on his way through that place. As he was glancing carelessly over the closely-written page, his eye was caught by some words in the cover, which he hastily took up, and where he read the following sentences:—"Mr. Vincent, Lord Donnington's son, has been here; but is just returned to London. He is said to be broken-hearted at having been refused by your travelling companion, the pretty Miss Leslie. Some people say, she behaved ill to him; but I dare say it is not true. People like to make that sort of charge against a girl who has many admirers, and who gives herself the airs of being fastidious. I wonder, however, that she should have refused Mr. Vincent, for he is good-looking, amiable, and an excellent *parti*. His aunt, Lady Rearsdale, who was with me this morning, says he is perfectly miserable about it."

Walter could scarcely command his agitation as he folded this letter, and looked towards Margaret, who was standing at the window gazing in a listless manner at the Rhine, and at the picturesque old buildings beyond it. He went up to her, and asked her to walk with him. His voice and manner were altogether different from

usual, and she looked at him with surprise, though she complied with his request. They went to the old cathedral, and then on to the alley of horse-chestnut trees beyond it, and seated themselves on a low stone wall which overhangs the majestic river. Walter, after a short silence, turned to her abruptly, and said—

“Margaret, will you be very angry with me if I ask you *one* question?”

The expression of his eyes, and the tone of his voice at that instant, were so unlike what they had been for the last few weeks, that a sudden emotion overcame her, but she tried to conceal her agitation by assuming something of her old manner, and she answered gaily—

“Since when are you so afraid of me, and of my anger, Walter?”

“Margaret,” he said in an earnest manner, “Margaret, can it be true that you have refused Frederic Vincent?”

The colour mounted rapidly into her cheeks, and she had a struggle with herself before she made any reply.

“I have been wrong,” he hastily exclaimed, as he perceived her uneasiness. “I had no right to inquire. Never mind answering me.”

“I *have* refused Frederic Vincent,” she said slowly, with her eyes fixed on the ground. His were raised to her face, and there was a vague hope in both their hearts. They looked at each other, but neither of them seemed able to speak. At last, in an almost stern manner, he said—

“Margaret, tell me the truth. Is it possible that you do not care for Vincent?”

Pride and emotion struggled in her heart, and she rose to go, but Walter imperiously detained her, and she exclaimed, at last, in a tone of wounded feeling—

“And is it possible that *you* care to know?”

“Margaret, do not trifle with me now,” he returned, with agitation. “There is a limit beyond which self-control cannot extend. I have struggled long, but I cannot restrain myself for ever. If you choose to force from me the avowal that I have suffered more than I had imagined a man could have suffered without betraying it, and, for the sake of your peace of mind, patiently submitted to the pain you have inflicted, hear it now, and in mercy spare the feelings you cannot return. I had hoped, I had resolved, never to speak to you thus; but it may be better for us both that you should know the

truth. Forgive me, Margaret, that I could not be silent to the end; forgive me that I could not hear you express such a doubt and answer you calmly. This is the last time I shall ever allude to this subject, or give way to these feelings. Soon I shall leave you."

"Walter!" she exclaimed, while a bright smile flashed through her eyes, lighting up their blue depths, like a ray of sunshine on flowers—"Walter!" she again repeated, as she turned her face towards him, and half kneeling on the edge of the bench, bent upon him those radiant orbs—"I love you with all my heart; but why did you leave my letter unanswered, and make all this mischief between us?"

"A letter! I never received one from you since I left England; and mine, Margaret! *mine* was a letter that *should* have had an answer!"

"I wrote one, I sent one. I told you to come back. I told you that I loved you, but it was not half so true then as it is now, for it amused me then to be admired by others; I took pleasure in Frederic Vincent's admiration, and almost fancied I liked him. Now look—here is his letter. He speaks of love—I believe he feels it. I care not for it. I would not exchange one word of affection from you, Walter, for all the love, and all the love-letters which the whole world could lay at my feet. There!"—She tore poor Vincent's letter into bits and threw it into the stream—"there, let the Rhine take it and bear it to the ocean; and do you take my vain, light heart into your keeping, and carry it along with you through the river of Life to the sea of Eternity! I am yours, Walter—yours for ever! No more secrets now, Old Walter! No more trials; you must take me, even as I am, for better and for worse; or while we wait till I grow better, I may only grow worse, and yet I shall never release you again. I have been too unhappy; and now, oh, now, I am too happy!"

What Walter felt, what Walter said, cannot well be described; but never in after life will he visit again the horse-chestnut alley near the cathedral of Basle, without an intense emotion, which will be mournful or sweet according as Heaven shall appoint his future lot. The dark cloud which had hung over their prospects passed away in that hour from the hearts of Walter and Margaret; and the joy which filled its place was as pure and as serene as the sky above their heads. Colonel Leslie's concentrated but evident delight at the announcement of their engagement, which his daughter insisted upon making to him that very evening, and the glad consent he

gave to her marriage, increased their happiness; and it was well for them that they enjoyed a few hours of undisturbed peace—that they had laid up a store of bliss, and tasted its first sweetness ere the morrow came to obscure the brightness, though not the blessings, of its eve. Letters reached Colonel Leslie on the following morning, which threw him, as well as Margaret and Walter, into the greatest anxiety and agitation; but before we reveal their contents, we must return to Ginevra, and once more resume the thread of her extraordinary history.

CHAPTER XX.

It was on one of those sultry mornings in the beginning of September, when the air feels sometimes more oppressingly hot than in the dog-days, that Ginevra was standing in the court of a small house in one of the most rural suburbs of London, the residence of the nuns among whom she had for a short time taken up her abode. She was watering a few languid wall-flowers and geraniums on which the soot, which disfigures the neighbourhood of London, as well as London itself, was resting in abundance. It was about a fortnight since she had come to this place, and at first the repose had seemed to do her good; but after the lapse of a few days she became conscious that either she was very ill, or in a strange state of nervous depression; her head at times ached violently, at others, an overpowering drowsiness overcame her; she would fall asleep in the chapel, in the parlour, or in the garden, and waking with crimson cheeks and burning hands look wildly about her, and start if any one addressed her; in the night she also often woke suddenly, fancying that some one was standing by her bed-side and calling to her to rise. Ginevra had retired to this convent and secluded herself from all wordly distractions for the express purpose of reflecting calmly on her position, and at the end of her retreat, if Father Francesco was not by that time arrived in England, to reveal her whole history under the seal of confession to the spiritual director of the convent, an old and experienced priest, with whom she might review the nature and the extent of her duties in the extraordinary position in which she was placed. This was her settled purpose; but she found each day more difficulty in fixing and arranging her thoughts on the subject, or in calling distinctly to mind the chain of incidents which had brought her to this point. A kind of dull apathy seemed to spread over her faculties and her feelings, and if she endeavoured to overcome this unnatural listlessness, the effort was followed by a sharp pain that darted like fire through her brain. The intense and unseasonable heat of the weather, added perhaps to this sensation; some of the nuns remarked that there was

something strange in the expression of her eyes. They were at all times very peculiar, but now the brilliancy of those light blue orbs was in singular contrast with the general languor of her appearance. Time seemed to pass by her unperceived; she would sometimes remain for hours together, seated on a bench in the garden, gazing on the ring which was usually concealed in her bosom, but which she now occasionally drew out. If any one, however, approached her, or fixed their eyes upon it, she started with a frightened and bewildered look, and hid it again with precipitation. There was a poor family in the neighbourhood of the convent, which Ginevra had been in the habit of visiting since she had been in London. The father was an Italian courier who had travelled from Genoa to England with the Warrens and herself, and had remained a few days at Grantley Manor after their return. He had been for many years married to an Englishwoman, and had lately found some difficulty in supporting her and a large number of children. Having failed to get a place during the London season, he had applied to Ginevra in his distress, and had interested her in behalf of his family. She exerted herself earnestly for their relief, and was of great use to one of his daughters who had met with an accident, and been confined to her bed for several weeks. In the close little room, where the invalid lay surrounded with squalling children and with the wet clothes, which the poor washerwoman had no other way of drying, hung up over her very bed, the presence of Ginevra was hailed with that smile of heartfelt satisfaction which is never elicited merely by the hope of pecuniary assistance.

The idea had never even occurred to her, that it was possible to *visit the poor* in the spirit of harsh dictation and arrogant superiority, which at one time seemed prevalent among us, as if their poverty gave us, in itself, a right to invade their houses, to examine into their concerns, and to comment and animadvert on their conduct in a manner which we would not ourselves endure from our best friends. It is long before we practically learn, though many among us are learning it by slow degrees, that we should respect the poor, and count it an honour and a blessing to have them "always with us," as our Lord told us we should—to cast aside our refinement, our sensitiveness, our delicacy, and our false shame, and perform real offices of love to the poor, not as a matter of display or effort (though there may, and must be, some effort in it at first), but as the natural result of our belief in Christ's words, and our trust in his promises. This was the spirit that made Ginevra's charity so par-

ticularly acceptable to the poor and suffering; it was tender and affectionate, and it was so without constraint. It was as natural to her to take on her knees one of the washerwoman's ragged children, or to kiss the pale forehead of her sick daughter, as it would have been to caress one of Lady Donnington's little boys, or to embrace Mrs. Warren after an absence of some weeks; and who can measure the amount of sympathy, and of consolation, comprised in those small details, which insensibly tell on the spirits of the sad and the suffering. The advance of civilization, the progress of worldly affairs, are gradually tending to a greater assimilation between the different classes of society; but the political barriers may vanish, and the social ones may remain in full force, and even with far more offensive stringency than ever, if the reserve (it cannot, in all cases, be called the pride) of wealth is suffered to remain in unabated vigour. The real source of influence is sympathy; the only means of exercising it is through sympathy; and we may bestow alms without end, and have societies without number, and see no results from our gifts and our labours, till we reach the hearts of the poor—and strange hearts they would be, if the distant nod, and the formal investigations, and the measured terms in which we are wont to address them, were to win them to us and to our objects! “Man does not live by bread alone” is a sentence which has a meaning even short of its highest spiritual sense; there is a germ of feeling in the human breast which springs into existence in the sunshine of another's sympathy, though for years, perhaps, it may have lain cold, and apparently dead, till some have even doubted its existence. But it is worth seeking for in the most unpromising soils; it is a flower which God has planted, and we may find it blossoming in the midst of apparent barrenness, like the Alpine rose in the depths of the glaciers.

While Ginevra was watering her flowers, the door of the court opened, and Giovanni's wife made her appearance, with her youngest baby in her arms. The child screamed for joy at seeing her, and soon the mother was relieved of her burthen and seated on the bench in the centre of the flower-garden. She began relating various particulars regarding her difficulties, while the baby, who had seized hold of the cross which Ginevra wore, was playing with it, and holding it up alternately to her and to his mother. Both their careworn faces, stamped with the impression of protracted anxiety, different in its nature but similar in its effects, contrasted with the joyousness of the infant, who seemed as if he was offering

to them both, in his unconscious glee, the symbol of suffering and the standard of hope. A fresh subject of sorrow was oppressing the heart of the poor mother, and she imparted it with tears to Ginevra's sympathising ears. Her husband had accepted a place which would take him abroad for a greater length of time than usual, and she would be left to struggle alone with her difficulties. He did say, indeed, that he would send her money out of his wages; but she knew, from past experience, that this was an uncertain prospect, and she feared, that once *abroad*—that vast, comprehensive, mysterious word, which causes so many hearts to sink within them with a nameless dread—he would not be always able, or always willing, to transmit to her those promised remittances, and the workhouse, that other word of fear, was haunting her imagination.

"The worst of it is, Miss Leslie," she went on, after wiping the corners of her eyes with her apron, "the worst of it is, that it's so sudden like. I don't know but he'll be off to-morrow, as the gentleman his new master is going to be married, and to go from the church door to the sea side, and abroad in a few days. Not a minute will he have to come and say a word of comfort to one, or to settle one's mind any ways. Them that goes abroad thinks but little of it to be sure, but it seems hard enough to them that stays behind. It was all a-settled last night, he says, and how it's such a good place, and I know it is, but for to go and leave us so suddenly, is not what he ever did before, and just now, when everything is so dear——"

"But Giovanni is a good man," interrupted Ginevra, in a soothing manner, "and he will not forget you and his poor children, and as his place is a good one, you will receive more assistance from him now, than when he was only engaged by the week. What is his master's name?"

"It's here in the letter, Miss. May be you would like to see it?" and Bessy held out to Ginevra the crumpled scrawl which she had drawn out of her pocket. After glancing over the first page, which comprised nothing but oddly worded regrets at leaving England, and excuses for the sudden nature of the arrangement, her eyes fell on the following words:—

"My new master is Mr. Neville. I saw him and settled with him last night at Mivart's Hotel; you know *that* Mr. Neville, who was staying at Grantley Manor when I went there with Mr. Warren; it was all along of him that I got the place. He is going to be married to-morrow at St. George's, Hanover Square, and I am to be

there at half-past eleven, with the carriage that is to take him and his wife to Hastings——”

At that moment, the clock was striking ten at the neighbouring parish church.

“Mivart’s Hotel! — Mr. Neville — Grantley Manor — marriage — St. George’s — that very day — that hour — the date — yesterday — going abroad!”

Oh, there is strength in the human frame when terror awakens it. There is a might in the feeble limbs when despair lends them speed. Weights have been lifted — walls have been scaled — bolts have been wrenched by the weak hands of women, when love and fear have made them strong; and she too can struggle, she too can fly, she too can reach that spot, lift up her voice at that altar, or die at its foot! She did not faint, she did not tremble now, she did not even turn pale. She gave the child to its mother, and drew her shawl over her breast, as if she had been cold. The thermometer was at eighty, and the sun shining on her at the time. She stared at Giovanni’s wife for a second as if about to speak, and then darted out of the door, and into the lane that led to the London Road. She walked — she ran — she flew along the dusty footpath. She was cold and shivered but her head was burning. An omnibus passed, in a minute she was inside. Then the intensity of suffering began. While she walked it had not been so acute; now the horses crawled along, while the fever raged in her veins. The coachman stopped for another passenger. She went almost mad. Each impediment, each delay, sent the blood to her head with violence, and then with a sickening revulsion back again to her heart. The crimson spot on her cheek grew deeper and deeper; the brilliancy of her eyes vanished, a dull film spread over them. She knew, or felt, or saw nothing, but that a crime was about to be committed, that she was dying, and that the road was lengthening before her. The fixity of her purpose guiding her, the intensity of fear paralysing her, the dreadful strength of agony supporting her, she went on, each second a minute, each minute an hour, that hour an eternity of suffering. The driver stopped again; she clenched her hands together and wrung them. “Are you wanting to get on? What’s the matter wi’ you?” said a rough man by her side. She did not answer, but he looked into her face and saw that the delay was killing her. “Have you money to pay for a cab? It would take you faster?” They were just passing a stand. She rushed out, was asked for the fare, and put her purse into the driver’s hand. He took out a

shilling, and gave it back to her, but shook his head, and touched his forehead with a significant gesture as she passed him. She sprung into a cab, gave the coachman a sovereign, and said in a scarcely audible tone, and then, when not understood, in a loud startling manner—“To St. George’s, Hanover-Square!” and, crouching at the bottom of the carriage with her head against the front seat, she prayed not to be too late—that prayer which has no form, no words, no cry, nothing but a silent wrestling for mercy—the struggle of a great agony which God sees and hears. Her sufferings drew to a close. Flashes of light seemed to pass before her eyes. Strange sounds mingled in her ears with the distant growling of the thunder. An unnatural strength seemed to animate her. She began to speak in a loud voice, and was conscious that she did so, and yet could not stop. She knew not where she was. Earth seemed passed away, Time to be no more. The carriage stopt—she sprung out—passed through the portal into the church—gazed wildly down the nave—tried to speak, to move, to scream, for he stood at the altar; she could not—she gasped—she stretched out her arms. He turned—he saw her—he knew her—he was with her—her arm was drawn in his—and through the crowd they darted away across the square towards Oxford-street, unconscious where they were, unconscious of what they were doing. He pressed her arm to his heart, but the mute caress was not returned; he spoke to her in short broken sentences, and no answer passed her lips; still she kept up with him, and walked on with her eyes bent on the ground. He asked, at last, in dreadful agitation, “Ginevra! do you hear me?” She stared at him and said “Yes.” “Where have you been?—where do you come from?—will you not answer me, Ginevra?” Still she said “Yes,” in that same strange voice, and gazed on him with the same fixed dull look as before. He turned very pale. A horrible thought occurred to him; one of those thoughts which freeze a man’s blood in his veins and make a cold sweat start on his brow; and the while, they stood in one of those crowded London thoroughfares, jostled by hundreds of busy hurrying passers-by—brought together he knew not how—an unnatural silence between them—his mind unable to contemplate the next step to be taken—and still they walked on, and still she spoke not. It was as if her spectre was accompanying him. He addressed her again in words of supplication, and still she answered “Yes,” in that deep unnatural tone. He grew almost frantic. “She is mad—she is mad” he

said to himself. He felt it; he knew it; *he* had driven her mad! Concentred in that instant was all the suffering which remorse and despair can inflict on a human soul. If she had not been there he might have destroyed himself, but she was at his side, and he must carry her to some spot where they might spend together what remained of life and reason, or, bereft of both, share a common cell or a common grave. To part with her while a ray of hope remained, to survive her if hope was at an end, seemed impossible. "Will you come with me, my Ginevra?" he gently said, and made a sign to a coachman to draw near. She did not answer, but sprang into the cab as if by a kind of instinct. He directed the man to drive to a house on the outskirts of London, where a woman who had been for many years housekeeper in his family kept lodgings, and then drawing down the blinds of the carriage, he took his wife in his arms and pressed her to his heart. She struggled to release herself, and knelt again, as she had done before, with her head on her hands, giving no sign of consciousness but a faint moaning which revealed an intensity of suffering which words cannot describe. As they passed a church, the clock struck twelve. At the first stroke she raised her head, and cried, "Too late! Too late!" and grasped convulsively a paper which was rolled up in her hand. Edmund drew it from her; it was Giovanni's letter, and part of the mystery was solved. At the first glance he perceived the confusion between his cousin's name and his own, and the allusion to his sister's marriage, which had caused the fatal mistake. How Ginevra came to be in England he knew not; how or when she had returned to it, he guessed not—had she gone out of her mind before the departure of her family, and escaped from the hands of others? His heart sickened at the thought, but the letter forbade that supposition. It was a horrible torture that Edmund Neville was going through. He had married a woman he adored, he adored her still, and he had driven her *mad*—to have killed her would have been less dreadful. Once she had said to him, "How will you answer at the day of judgment, for torturing a human soul into destruction?" Her soul, blessed be the God whom she served, had not been lost in the fierce conflict; but even this he knew not. Where she had been, what she had done, whither she was going, what design or what chance had brought her into his presence in that hour of retribution, he knew not; nothing but that she was there by his side, and that life was ebbing and reason failing. When the cab stopped before Mrs. Atkinson's

house, and the step was let down, he took Ginevra in his arms, and carried her upstairs, while the old housekeeper gazed on him in silent amazement.

"Open that door!" he said, imperiously, as they reached the landing-place; and when his command was obeyed, he laid her on the bed and stood by her side. For a moment she remained perfectly still in the position in which he had placed her. He removed her bonnet, and one of her locks got entangled in the velvet ribbon round her neck, and accidentally drew it from her bosom. She started, seized her wedding ring, and mechanically sought to hide it. He saw this; heaven knows what he felt; he took it from the ribbon, put it on her finger, and pressed his burning lips to the passive hand which was yielded to his grasp. Then he went to despatch two messengers, one for a doctor and his own servant, and the other to tell his sister that an unexpected occurrence had summoned him away, and would detain him in London; but that he would write to her at Hastings.

As he was returning to the room where Ginevra was, Mrs. Atkinson stopped him, and said, in a trembling voice—

"Mr. Edmund, I owe everything I possess in the world to your family. This house is your's more than mine—still, Mr. Edmund, I must say—"

"She is dying, Atkinson—she is dying; and if she dies, I am a wretch for whom life will be a curse. Help me to save her if you would save me from hell."

Frightened and agitated, the old woman followed him into the room, and stood at the foot of the bed, and after remaining there a moment, turned away in tears. The youthful features—the fragile form—the long dark eyelashes resting on the sunken cheek—the traces of past suffering stamped on the present insensibility of the careworn face, over which a dark dull heaviness was gathering—it was a sight of more than common sorrow! Edmund drew her arms round his neck, and pressed her to his breast.

"Ginevra! Ginevra!" he repeated twice, with heart-rending despair. She seemed to hear him, for she shuddered, and drew him closer to herself. "Ginevra—my own Ginevra—speak to me;" he murmured in her ear. She started, grasped his hands, looked at him, and then gave a piercing cry, which was succeeded by a laugh—one of those fearful laughs that make the blood run cold, and the hair stand on end. A brain-fever had begun,—a continual delirium ensued—and then was poured forth the anguish

which that slight frame and that strong spirit had so long contended against. It was a dreadful retribution for Edmund Neville to stand by that bed and listen to those ravings,—to drink that cup of misery to the dregs, and to feel that it was not man's hand that was forcing it to his lips—that it was not a judgment of man's designing which had overtaken him in that hour of vengeance—that One mightier than himself had smitten him with his own weapons, and condemned him out of his own mouth. Then he, for the first time, felt whom he had striven against, when he had put his own human will in opposition to the conscience of a fellow-creature, and the nature of the warfare he had waged against the faith of that young heart, which had not yielded in weakness but broken in agony. He felt it, and he prayed—he knelt by that bed, and prayed as men pray when death is at hand and no help near—as they pray, when earth gives way beneath their feet, and eternity opens before them. Sometimes, in the midst of her delirium, she would raise her eyes to his, or hide her face [in his breast as if to find there a shelter, and then start back in wild affright, and cover her face with her burning hands, as if some vision had scared her. The terror which his presence, which his whispered words of love seemed to cause her, increased every hour; and when the doctors came at last, they forced him from her side, and forbade him to stand in her sight, or to speak within her hearing. Then his sufferings deepened as he sat alone in the front room of that dark house. If pangs inflicted upon others can be expiated by those endured by ourselves, Edmund Neville atoned during that night for those he had caused to his wife. To know that, if he lost her (and in the words and the faces of all who approached him, he vainly sought for a gleam of hope that he would *not* lose her) he should be the veriest wretch that ever trod the earth,—bereft of the one only being he really loved—desolate, lonely, with faith enough in the reality of what she had lived and died for, to be goaded with a perpetual remorse, and not enough to be raised from the abyss of despair—these were the forebodings and visions of that long night, broken by nothing but the sound of her voice calling upon him, even in the midst of the ravings of delirium, and adjuring him not to forsake her.

After two days and nights of such misery as many have, in some measure, experienced—as *all*, perhaps, have, in some degree, been acquainted with; but which, thank Heaven, is seldom barbed with the stings of insupportable remorse—he heard that the violence of

the fever had abated, and that a gleam of consciousness had returned ; but other symptoms had shown themselves which excited much uneasiness in the minds of the medical men, and they reiterated their injunctions that he should, on no account, present himself before her eyes. At the same time they assured him that no immediate fatal termination to her illness was to be apprehended, though the eventual result, both as regarded life and reason, was, to the last degree, precarious. When two of the physicians, who had been in constant attendance upon Ginevra, had withdrawn, Dr. Drury, who had long been acquainted with Edmund and his family, remained behind, and ventured an inquiry as to the name and social position of the young person in question, and suggested that if she had any friends who would be willing to see her, it might be as well to consult with them, especially in the event of her mind being impaired by the violence of the brain fever. He fixed his eye on Edmund as he pronounced that sentence, and was shocked at the sight of the suffering he had inflicted ; he felt embarrassed in the presence of feelings whose extent or depth he had not measured. The compassionate familiarity with which he had spoken of Ginevra had brought before Edmund, with a painful clearness, the nature of her position in the eyes of others ; but, as a breath of air over a scorching desert, there passed, almost at the same moment, through his mind, a thought which gave momentary relief to his sufferings. He would proclaim her his wife on her death-bed, and sacrifice on her grave every worldly hope—every earthly prospect. He would fetch his sister to her side, and with his dying treasure in his arms, bid an eternal farewell to all he had ever valued, and which he now loathed as the price for which he had bartered Ginevra's life. "Save her," he said, and convulsively grasped the doctor's hand ; "save her, and me—if you can." He could no proceed—a strong emotion overcame him, and for the first time he gave way to a burst of grief which found vent in tears. That dreadful trial had done its work, the pride, which had been almost as strong as death, but not so strong as remorse in the presence of death, was bowed down to the dust ; the indomitable spirit had yielded in the unequal strife, and the iron will melted in the furnace of affliction. In broken accents he committed Ginevra to the care of Dr. Drury and Mrs. Atkinson, and prepared to leave that house for the first time, since he had entered it with his wife in his arms ; but first he approached the door of her room, and kneeling on the threshold, covered his face with his hands, and then stretched

them towards the bed where she lay, keeping down the while, with a violent effort, the convulsive sobs that were heaving his chest. He heard her murmur his name in her uneasy sleep, and then a shudder ran through her frame, and she seemed to struggle with some imaginary danger. Her arms were thrown round the bed-post, and she clasped it so firmly that the nurse could not draw her from it, till, bruised and exhausted, she fell back and remained pale and motionless as a marble image of death. As Edmund left that room he turned to the doctor, who had led him hastily away, and said in a low voice,

“In a few hours I shall be here again—to see her—die, perhaps—” he added, with a burst of uncontrollable emotion, which he surmounted and continued, “You tell me I shall see her again. I know you would not willingly deceive me; but, if you should be yourself deceived—if she should wake—and be conscious—and be—dying—and I not here—say this to her—say that I told you she was my wife—that I loved her—that I will be faithful to her till I die. That—if the blessing which in my madness I forfeited, is taken from me—that my life shall be a long or a short expiation, as the justice, or the mercy of Heaven shall appoint. Tell her that her family and mine, and the whole world, shall know that I loved, married, idolised her—but broke her heart, and lost her—that she was an angel, and I—her husband—do not tell her what *I* am; she knows it; but say, that I, too, know it now—that I hate myself. Of *her* I cannot speak—*she* will not hate me—watch her, save her if you can. O my God! what is to become of me, if I lose her?—the curse of Cain!—and *he* did not love his brother. Doctor, did you ever know a man who adored a woman, and killed her?”

The person he was addressing looked at him with astonishment, hardly comprehending the meaning of these incoherent sentences; but anxious that a calmer attendant on Ginevra's sick bed should be speedily summoned, he urged Edmund's departure, and exhorted him to assemble, without delay, those persons who had an interest in her. Much of what he had said he considered as the ravings of a grief heightened to distraction by self-reproach, and shaking him kindly by the hand, he left him, without making any further inquiries regarding the extraordinary communication he had made to him.

When Edmund found himself in a post-chaise-and-four on his road to Hastings, where his sister, Mrs. Charles Neville, had removed, he felt bewildered with the strangeness of his situation,

and unable to fix his thoughts on anything, but the scene he had just left, and to which he pined to return. Such a revolution had taken place in his feelings, that he scarcely knew himself again; his fears, his hopes, his sufferings, were all of a different nature from any he had yet experienced. Pride and shame scarcely touched him; they were absorbed in deeper emotions. He could scarcely look backward or forward; he felt like a man who, wrecked on a stormy sea, has yielded up, after a long struggle, the spar which he had clung to with desperate tenacity; a fearful future is before him, but one kind of suffering is at an end. He is adrift on the ocean, but the dreadful contest is over, he has ceased to battle with the waves; his vain efforts cannot save him; the abyss is beneath him, and Heaven above him, clouded, dark, black with storms, but not wholly shut out from his expiring glance.

It was on an autumn day of sunny radiance and gorgeous gladness, that Edmund Neville took this journey. It was the time of the hop-gathering—the people were at work in crowds, and the land seemed to smile in its rich abundance. When some of the busy labourers, or of the merry idlers that gazed for an instant on the travelling carriage that passed rapidly through those fair scenes and lovely villages, caught sight of the stranger's face, an involuntary sigh escaped them, for it was no ordinary countenance that met their eyes, and the stamp of no ordinary suffering that marked it. As the lengthening shadows indicated the approach of evening, he came in sight of Hastings, and soon drove up to the door of his sister's house.

Mrs. Neville was alone, and started when the servant announced her brother; but she came to meet him, and held out her hand kindly, but coldly. He was looking so dreadfully ill, however, that she felt shocked and anxious; but unaccustomed to give vent to her feelings, she sat down again, and began to speak of indifferent things. He did not answer a word, but remained standing by the chimney, with his eyes fixed on the clock, and apparently unconscious of her presence.

She said at last, "I will send word to Charles that you are here;" and she got up to ring the bell. He stopped her hand, and said abruptly—

"Bear with me for an instant, I have but this moment to be with you—my wife is dying."

Mrs. Neville did not say a word, but drew a deep breath, and clasped her hands together. He went on in a hurried manner—

"You may suppose *why* I am here. I ought to ask your forgiveness, for I have deceived and defrauded you—" she made an impatient gesture, and he went on—"I have been married for more than a year to Colonel Leslie's daughter. She is a Catholic. You know the rest. You cannot hate and despise me half so much as I hate and despise myself."

He shaded his face with his hand, and leant against the chimney. She looked at him earnestly for a moment, and then went up to him, put her hand on his shoulder, and said—

"Brother!"

He flung himself into her arms, and both cried bitterly.

"Do you forgive me, Anne?" he murmured.

She laid her forehead on his shoulder, and again burst into tears.

"You would forgive me if you knew how wretched I am—she is so ill."

"Where is she, Edmund?"

"At Mrs. Atkinson's house. I took her there on the day of your marriage; at the moment when I suddenly left your side, she had appeared to me as a vision; at the church door I had seen her, and when I reached her she could not speak, she could not complain—her mind was affected. I suffered—God only knows what I have suffered. Anne, you never, never can understand the misery I have endured."

She passed her hand over his brow, and her tears almost blinded her, for many were the grey hairs among those locks which, three days ago, were as black as the raven's wing.

"I care not what becomes of me," he resumed; "it is not poverty, or truth, or repentance, that has brought me here; but only misery—misery so deep, so vast, so boundless, that it has made all earthly possessions valueless. But I know you forgive me," he continued, raising her hand to his lips—"I know you feel for me, though I am an impostor."

"O, brother, brother!" she cried, and hid her face in his breast, then raising her head, she said earnestly, "you have spoken now, when you might have remained for ever silent."

"Silent *now*?—O, Anne, you do not know what she is—you do not know what I have done. If I lose her!—it would be more than I can bear, and yet I see it coming."

He shuddered, and fell into a chair, his face covered with his hands. Anne knelt by his side, and in a moment asked, in a subdued voice—

"How came she to be in England?—her father and sister are gone abroad."

"I do not know, Anne—I cannot tell. I received her in my arms even as a brain fever was raging in her frame. In mercy or in wrath she was sent to me to die in my sight. I know nothing more, but that she is dying, and that my own brain is maddening, and my heart breaking."

Anne sighed deeply. Strange thoughts were passing through her mind of the ways of God not being as man's ways, of men marring by their evil deeds what Heaven had ordained for them; of a mysterious Providence over-ruling, for vengeance or for mercy, the passions of men's hearts—of plain paths made crooked through their iniquities—of gracious purposes forfeited by a blinded self-will—but she only said, "Mercy will be shown to you, brother, for your sufferings are great."

At that moment her husband entered the room. A burning flush passed over Edmund's brow, a convulsive emotion on his face; but he went up to his cousin and shook hands with him; then turning to his sister, he said, in a firm voice—

"Heaven bless you, Anne, for the mercy you have shown me. Tell *him* what a guilty wretch I have been, what a miserable wretch I am now, and both pray for me—that Ginevra—"

He could say no more; and moved towards the door. Anne whispered a few words to her husband, and then, touching her brother's arm, she said, gently—

"I am going with you, Edmund. Wait a moment, while I get ready. Charles will follow us in a few hours."

Edmund folded her in his arms, and hope revived in his heart. When she put her arm within his, he felt as if Heaven was having mercy on him. She withdrew an instant with her husband, and said to him, in a low voice—

"Must I tell him now?"

"You must judge of that yourself," he replied, and in a moment she was in her brother's carriage, and they were rapidly proceeding towards London.

To Anne and to her husband the discovery of that day had been more agitating than surprising, for both had long suspected the truth which had thus been disclosed to them.

CHAPTER XXI.

For several hours Ginevra had been asleep, and it was not till about an hour after Edmund's departure for Hastings that she opened her eyes; they wandered in silent astonishment round the room where she was lying—they rested at last on the face of the old woman who had been watching all night by her side and whose features were strange to her. Too weak to speak or almost to think, she closed them again and sighed deeply. Mrs. Atkinson, whose heart had, in spite of herself, been gradually warming towards her charge, bent over her and said in a soothing manner—

“Are you better, my dear?”

Ginevra looked up into her face with a bewildered but conscious expression, and then raising with difficulty her thin hands to her head, she pressed them to her temples, and finding her hair was gone, she began to tremble.

“Have I been mad?” she whispered.

“No, no, my dear, it was only a fever; it is over now, and——”

“Is it over?” she said, in a louder tone, and glancing with a frightened look at all the objects round her. “It is *not* over, all is strange here. Where am I?—in another world?—or am I mad?—speak. Oh, how my head aches! Who brought me here?”

“Now, be quiet, do—there's a dear, and try to go to sleep again. The doctors said you were not to talk and excite yourself,” said Mrs. Atkinson, who justly feared to mention Edmund's name.

“Who brought me here?” repeated Ginevra, trying to raise her weak head from the pillow.

“Your friends my dear. Now do be quiet and go to sleep.”

She might as well have bidden the waves be still or the wind be silent.

“Who brought me here? Who stood one night at the foot of that bed? Who was weeping in that next room all last night? I heard him. Who knelt at that door and beckoned to me to come just now. I *could not*—I *could not*——”

"Hush, my dear. It was only Mr. Neville come to see how you did."

"Come to see how I did! What does it all mean? Where am I? Who am I? What am I? What has he done with me? Where are my father and my sister? I am horribly afraid. What is this house? Whose is this house? Who are you?"

"Mrs. Atkinson, your nurse, my dear. This is my house. How you tremble; don't be frightened, my dear. How scared you look. Shall I say a prayer for you?"

Ginevra held out her hand and feebly pressed the old woman's while she murmured,—

"Thank God for those words. I can trust you now. But I think I am dying. My brain is so confused; send for a priest—a——"

She could not finish the sentence, but showed the nurse a little crucifix in her hand and then fell back exhausted. Mrs. Atkinson rang the bell in a hurry, and in the first instance sent for the doctor, and then proceeded to consider how she could best comply with Ginevra's request. The crucifix and the rosary which she wore about her sufficiently indicated that she was a Catholic, and the only question was to find out the name and the residence of a priest of that religion. Her next door neighbour had a Catholic maid-of-all-work who attended the Chapel in——street, and she learnt from this girl that one of the priests there was a foreigner, which immediately decided her to despatch a messenger in that direction; for Ginevra's name, and the foreign language in which she had been constantly raving in her delirium, had made her aware that she was not a native of England. Mrs. Jones's maid volunteered to go in search of the Abbé Rossi. Ginevra's strange arrival at Mrs. Atkinson's had been for the last three days a subject of universal discussion in the neighbourhood, and all sorts of stories had been circulated about the beautiful young foreigner who had been brought by Mr. Neville to No. 5, Melville Terrace, and had gone mad, and was dying in the retired housekeeper's house. Some asserted that he had poisoned her, and that it was a crying shame that he had not been arrested. Others declared that an inquest would be held on the body as soon as she was dead, and that strange doings would then come to light. Some reported that Mr. Neville had fled from the house that morning in a chaise and four, and looking as pale as if he felt the police at his heels. The comments on his conduct and on Mrs. Atkinson's were endless; much wonder was expressed that she had not turned such a creature

from her doors; and it was predicted that no respectable person would ever enter her house again. It was answered that no doubt Mr. Neville had made it worth her while to receive her; and it was even darkly hinted that may be he had made it still more worth her while to put the poor young creature altogether out of the way. Some shook their heads and prophesied that she would not pass that threshold alive; and others confidently asserted that she had escaped from Bedlam, where her friends had put her out of harm's way. With her head full of these various stories, and withal an honest and pious anxiety to procure the poor object of these reports the spiritual consolations which she needed, Martha Blunt hastened along the streets in the direction of——Chapel. When she reached it, and knocked at the door of the small adjoining house, it was opened by a maid, who informed her that the Abbé Rossi was absent for some days; and that Mr. Connor, the English priest, was out, and not expected at home for several hours. Martha made an exclamation of disappointment, and asked the girl if she could direct her to any other priest, as the case was urgent, and admitted of no delay.

“And sure is the poor thing dying, and she a sinner!” cried the warm-hearted Irish girl in a tone of real distress, and she began rehearsing with volubility all the reasons that made it impossible to pursue Mr. Connor through his various visits, and her fears that it might be full seven o'clock before he returned to his hurried dinner. At last an idea struck her, which she immediately imparted to Martha. Two days ago, she said, an Italian priest had come on a visit to the Abbé Rossi, and she had heard him mention that very morning that he had received faculties from the Catholic bishop of London to hear confessions in his diocese, with the view of assisting, for a while, the priests of——Chapel in their overwhelming labours. “And sure,” added Kate Bryan, “he is at this blessed moment saying mass at the side altar; and if you will wait here, or which will be more for your soul's good, say a prayer in the chapel for that poor young dying creature, sure it's me that shall speak to him as he comes out, and it's you that will show him the way to her, for sorrow can he make it out for himself in this same blessed London, which was never intended for strangers to walk in, except just to lose their way and learn the language by asking it.”

When the priest came into the vestry, he found the two girls waiting for him, and Kate made him aware of the object of Martha's

visit. He understood English quite well, and spoke it a little. On hearing the circumstances of the case, which were related to him with several additions from the comments of the neighbours, he immediately prepared to follow Martha. It was with a sigh that he glanced over a letter which had reached him that morning : it spoke of difficulties and troubles besetting one he loved, and whom he had been that day about to seek, and the delay which this new call of duty imposed upon him was one of those countless sacrifices of which the life of a priest is composed. It would have been difficult for any one to look upon this old man without a feeling of reverence ; his brow was thoughtful, and his countenance had that mild and grave serenity which is sometimes the visible sign of a life throughout which every selfish object has been renounced, every passion subdued, and every virtue practised. His head resembled some of those pictures which are met with of aged saints, whose wrinkled brows and withered features bear the stamp of an unearthly beauty. In broken English he asked his guide some questions about the person he was about to see ; but could learn nothing more than that a rich gentleman of the name of Neville had brought her to Mrs. Atkinson's, had remained himself in the house till that morning, had sent for three doctors to attend her, and paid the builders next door to suspend their work since her arrival. She added that Mrs. Atkinson's maid, who had been sometimes in the sick room, supposed that she must have done something very dreadful, poor thing, for that, in her delirium, she was always bidding them not tell, and asking if any one knew who she was ; and then she would be searching for something, and feeling her neck, and crying out all of a sudden, "He has taken it away ; give it me back—give it me back."

"Is the gentleman a Catholic?" the priest inquired.

Martha thought not ; but could not tell for sure.

"Did he know that she had sent for a priest?" he asked again.

He had gone away some hours before, and was not expected back till the evening, she replied, and then pointed to the house, which they had nearly reached. Mrs. Atkinson was standing at the door, and when the priest went up to her, she received him civilly, and said, as she showed him into the parlour, that the young person who had sent for him had fallen asleep, and that the doctor had desired her not to be disturbed, but that if his reverence would wait in the front room, she would be at hand to let him know as soon as she awoke. He was accordingly shown up stairs, and

Mrs. Atkinson gliding into the next room, which was nearly dark, he remained alone. Seating himself in a chair by the chimney, he took out his breviary and began to read it in silence, the ticking of the old clock on the mantel-piece, and the occasional rustling of the housekeeper's silk gown, being the only sounds that were audible in the profound stillness of that apartment. After a while he closed his book and listened, for the sufferer had become restless and was talking in her sleep. A strange expression passed over the old man's face. Some Italian words had reached his ears. He rose and walked softly up and down the room. As he passed by a writing-table near the window, his eyes fell on an object which arrested his attention; it was a rosary which had once been his own, he could not be mistaken; and as he grasped it with one hand, and pressed the other to his temples as if to collect his senses, he asked himself if it was possible that she to whom he had given these beads could have parted with them. He struggled with a thought that was forcing its way into his mind; he prayed against it; but neither efforts nor prayers availed. It took a form, it grew, it advanced upon him, it mastered him. The housekeeper came in at that moment, and said, "She is awake now, and seems calm, though very weak. Will you go to her?"

The old man rose and advanced towards the door. A single ray made its way through the half opened shutter of the sick room, and cast a faint light on the carpet. There was a chair placed by the side of the bed; he approached it, and stood in that dark room, with his eyes clouded, and his heart beating. The dying woman murmured, "Father, give me your blessing," in so faint a tone, that it conveyed nothing to him, but the intimation that his sacred ministry was called for. She had hid her face in her hands, and he solemnly pronounced the answering benediction. She heard it—she trembled—she gasped for breath, stretched out her arms, cried "Father!" and then fainted away. When she revived, Mrs. Atkinson was standing near her, and bathing her temples. Her eyes sought Father Francesco, and met his calm, mournful gaze. A ray of light had fallen on that bed of sorrow, and, as he feared, of shame, and he had seen there the only being he loved on earth. Now, indeed, he dreaded no other trials, for life could bring no such misery, and death no such suffering. There was no anger in his face or in his heart; nothing but a deep sadness, and a great compassion. The tears were rolling slowly down her sunken cheeks. She took his hand within her own, and he did not with-

draw it. Twice he made an ineffectual attempt to speak; at last he said, "Heaven bless thee, my child! Thou hast been lost, but found again. If thy sin is great, God's mercy is greater still." She raised her hand to her brow, and, as she had done in her delirium, felt anxiously for the ribbon round her neck. Her eye fell on her finger, on which Edmund had placed the wedding-ring. A faint colour rose in her cheek. She beckoned to Father Francesco to come closer to her, and then whispered to him, "I have greatly sinned; but not as you think. Father! I am married, and I am dying because I would not abandon my faith."

Tears of gratitude sprang into Father Francesco's eyes, as he raised them to Heaven; and he answered solemnly, "It is enough, my child; I believe it. And if man has deceived thee, my Ginevra, God will receive thee."

She fell back on the pillow with his hand still locked in her's, and a few moments of silence followed, for she was too weak to speak much at a time. He gazed on her pale face—he grasped her feeble hand, and blessed God in his heart. What cared he now if the world despised her—if her earthly father rejected her, now that from her lips he had heard those words of comfort.

Though the spring of her young life was broken, and she was going down to the grave in the morning of her days; though the flower which had blossomed by his side in his old age had, like the prophet's gourd, withered in a night, and perished before the aged tree, which had once sheltered it, Heaven was opening to receive her; his own long pilgrimage was drawing to a close, and both were advancing towards the land where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest. When Ginevra roused herself again, she informed him, at intervals, of the circumstances of her history, and he gathered from these broken sentences some idea of the situation she was placed in, but not enough to enlighten him as to its precise nature. He strongly suspected that her innocence had been practised upon, and it was with difficulty that the aged priest could look forward with calmness to an interview with the man who had deceived and betrayed her whom he had left pure, bright, and happy, and whom he had found again dying and dishonoured. To remove her from that house would have been his ardent desire; but as that was impossible, he resolved to remain by her side, to watch over her to the last, to support her through the valley of the shadow of death by all the sacred aids which religion affords, to resign her to none but God, and then depart, and

finish his own appointed course, without one earthly care or joy to cast a cloud or a ray over its remaining days.

As the night advanced Ginevra grew rapidly worse, but at the same time her mind seemed to become clearer, and her memory more accurate. The doctor came again, and looked anxiously at his watch, as if calculating the probable time of Edmund's return. He spoke in a low voice to Mrs. Atkinson, and gave some directions about his patient. If any further change took place he was to be instantly sent for; he recommended that she should accomplish her religious duties at once, as she might any moment now relapse into unconsciousness.

* * * * *

The holy rites had been performed. To him who had received her first confession, Ginevra had made her last, and never had the pardoning words descended into her heart with a more sacred power than in that hour when life was receding and eternity approaching. The last blessed sacrament had been received, and extreme unction administered to her—the soul was strengthened for its last struggle, and the light of another world had dawned upon her sight. For a moment her strength seemed to return; she held out her hand to the priest, and beckoned to him to sit down by her side. He came, and she bowed her head while he fervently blessed her; then raising it again, she fixed her eyes upon him, and spoke in a low but distinct voice—

“Father, I am about to die. I feel it—I know it. And never have I thanked God for an earthly blessing as I thank him for this. But one prayer I have to make to you; and if you love me, as I know you love me,” she added, as the old man's tears flowed down his withered cheeks, “you will hear it—you will grant it. I am married! Father, I am married! and Edmund Neville is my husband. I have seen him here, at the foot of my bed, at my side. His arm has been round me. I have felt his kisses on my cheek, and his tears on my brow. He will return—he will come again to the side of this bed *once*; I know not when—this night, or to-morrow, or later still; but I know he will come to look on what he once loved,—to ask the cold lips to pardon him, the *dead* to forgive him,—and there will be none to say, ‘She blessed you—she prayed for you—she loved you to the last.’ Father! *you* must be there when he comes. *You* must bless him. Will you, Father? Do not turn away——”

"I will pray for him, my child ;" answered the priest in a broken voice.

"Oh ! but you must bless him, Father—you must promise to bless him, or I cannot die in peace ! Tell him I never loved any one but him. He thought I had disobeyed him once—I never did. Tell him so, and ask him to keep this." She drew from her finger the little ring her tears had so often washed. "It has been near my heart ever since we married. I have never told anybody but you that we were married. I do not know why I am here. I think I went out of my mind, and was brought to this place. Comfort my father and my sister. Tell them how I loved them, but do not tell them I was married—unless you ought—unless you must—my head feels weak and confused !—but if they love me, let them be kind to Edmund. Let me speak to you, Father ; do not bid me rest—I shall rest soon, but now hear me. By your prayers—by your tears—by the memory of her he once fondly loved—by all the sufferings I have endured—by the deep, deep faith with which I die—win him to penitence, to hope, to truth. Deal gently with him ; and if the day should come when he sees the truth as I see it, as we see it, dear Father,—tell him that in this my dying hour, I foresaw it, and was glad."

An expression of joy passed over Ginevra's face as she uttered these last words. She fixed her eyes upwards with a steady gaze, which lasted a few minutes, and then she relapsed into unconsciousness, and the doctor was hastily summoned.

Two hours later, when Father Francesco, who had hurried for a few minutes to his own home, was entering the front room, he found a lady in deep mourning established there, whose countenance and attitude betokened an extreme interest and anxiety. She rose at his approach, and glancing at his dress, said, in a manner at once quiet and respectful—

"May I ask, sir, if you are the priest who has been attending on—my brother's wife ?"

He looked steadily and keenly at her, and in a tone which thrilled through Mrs. Neville's heart as if she had been herself the guilty person inquired after, responded—

"I am, Madam. Where is your brother ?"

"There," she said, pointing to the next room ; and unable to restrain her tears—"there, watching in despair over her unconscious form—an hour sooner, and he might have received her forgiveness."

"She *has* forgiven him," he answered gently. "The last words she uttered were to invoke a blessing on his head."

"Thank God for that! Thank God for it!" Mrs. Neville ejaculated in a hurried manner. "If any one could tell him! I dare not go near them"—she trembled as she spoke—"there is something awful in such grief as his. He is almost out of his mind—but if he knew that she had prayed for him. Can *you* go in?" she asked in a nervous manner. "Could you speak to him?"

Father Francesco approached the bed near which Edmund was kneeling, and gently touched his shoulder, but almost started back at the haggard expression of his face, as for an instant he turned it towards him.

"Leave me," he said in a whisper. "Leave us. You can do nothing here. You were with her in her hours of consciousness. You brought her the consolations you could give. There are none for her destroyer. I have nothing left me but these last moments, in which I can hold her in my arms—do not disturb us. You do not know what grief is—you may have seen it, but you never felt it, or you could not see that angel dying, and remain calm. But I forget—you have not killed her!"

He bent over her, and looked into her face, as if, by the intensity of that gaze, he could detain the life that was ebbing. He drew her head on his bosom, and spoke not another word; the priest was kneeling at the foot of the bed; after a while Anne Neville glided in, and knelt there also, and both prayed in silence. Thus the hours went by, and the night advanced; the nurse went and came, and the doctor stood near the bed; Edmund stirred not—the least movement might have disturbed her; he would have wished to still the beating of his heart; her breathing was so faint he could not discern it. Now and then the doctor felt her pulse, and held a glass to her lips: she never moved, but a pang of speechless agony shot through his mind in those instants. Still he waited, and the hours went by, and the suspense went on, and the prayers of the priest and of his companion grew more fervent, and the light of day began to dawn. Again the doctor drew near the bed, and this time he said, "The pulse is stronger." Still Edmund stirred not; something sharper than pain had run through his frame as those words were pronounced; and through the next hour he seemed to himself to suffer more than before, for there was a change, and life and death were trembling in the balance. The sun was rising, a ray of light made its way into the room, and she moaned faintly.

The doctor signed to him to lay her head on the pillow, and he held something to her lips; she swallowed what he had prepared, opened her eyes once, closed them immediately, and fell asleep again. "She will recover now," the doctor whispered, and forcibly led him from the room. He would have fallen had he not been thus supported. The sudden emotions of that moment, joined to the excessive fatigue he had endured, almost overpowered him, and he nearly fainted. He had not given way to his feelings during all that long night; now he wept like a child, and then suddenly pressed his sister to his heart in a transport of joy, which she vainly endeavoured to calm.

With a gratitude as fervent, but less vehement, Father Francesco sat for a moment by the bedside, from which all but him had withdrawn. He blessed the sleeping form of his Ginevra, and then rose to leave the place where he had suffered and prayed for so many hours. As he entered the front room, Edmund, whose face wore traces of the most violent emotion, went up to him, and said in Italian—

"Father, you prayed for her all night. I heard it—I felt it."

"I prayed more for you than for my Ginevra," answered the priest; and he added simply, but with his voice trembling as he spoke, "I was her mother's uncle, and came to this country to seek her."

"Father Francesco!" exclaimed Edmund with agitation.

"I came to seek her," repeated the old man; "and how and where have I found her?"

Edmund hid his face in his hands.

"You said she was his wife?" he added, turning to Mrs. Neville, with an expression of anxiety.

Edmund started up, seized the arm of the priest, and cried—

"She is my wife. Will you, will God, ever forgive me?"

Anne looked at him with eyes full of tears, and Father Francesco pressed his hand kindly; and then Edmund returned to that place at Ginevra's side, where he had suffered such misery, and which he now resumed with such gratitude.

After an interval of repose, Mrs. Neville related to Father Francesco the history of her brother, and of Ginevra, such as she had learnt it from himself during their dreadful journey of the preceding day. Her voice shook when she adverted to the prejudices which had been the origin of all their trials; her cheeks glowed with shame, and her eyes were bent on the ground, as she spoke of the

want of moral courage in the first instance, and of the criminal silence which had subsequently stained her brother's character; but when she alluded to the stern uncompromising Protestantism of her family, and to the upright character of him who had unconsciously inflicted upon others such fearful sufferings, her eyes were raised again, and her voice grew firm. She saw the fatal result of long-standing prejudices and hereditary hatreds, and deeply lamented them; but she did not blush for one whose convictions had been sincere, and whose motives had been conscientious and pure. When her husband arrived, she left him to explain to Father Francesco in greater detail the situation in which Edmund was placed, and the circumstances which had brought about in so extraordinary a manner Ginevra's return to her husband, and which, after bringing her to the brink of the grave, had finally placed her in the position which she ought long ago to have occupied. He listened with a feeling of deep sympathy in her past trials, but still deeper gratitude that she had passed through them unscathed, and won the crown promised to those who suffer for righteousness' sake. It was agreed between him and Charles Neville, that Colonel Leslie ought instantly to be informed of the events which had taken place since his departure from England, and a messenger was despatched for that purpose with Edmund Neville's knowledge and consent.

When Ginevra awoke, after a long and refreshing sleep, her hand was in Edmund's, and on the finger of that hand was the wedding-ring which was never to leave it again.

"Am I dreaming?" she whispered, and passing her arm round his neck, she drew him close to herself. "If I am, do not wake me."

He kissed her again without speaking. The nurse passed through the room, and stood a moment near the bed.

"Are you not afraid?" Ginevra whispered, as he still held her hand, and pressed it to his lips.

"Afraid of nothing but your not forgiving me, my wife," he answered.

"O, Edmund!" she cried, and threw her arms round his neck; then, pushing him back a little, she looked into his face with an anxious expression; but still clinging to him, as if she feared to let him go, she whispered, "Edmund, are you ruined?"

"Ruined in fortune, rich in happiness, my treasure!" he replied; and she read in his eyes the truth of what he said. "Gi-

nevra, dearest, you will have to plead for me with your father. Father Francesco has forgiven me, and he knows all."

"It is not a dream, then; you speak of my father; you have seen my uncle; you do not start and hurry away when others come near us, Edmund. I was so glad to die, and now—" a faint smile passed over her wan features; she fixed her eyes on his, and murmured, "now I am glad to live."

He clasped her again to his heart; their tears flowed in silence; his caresses, and his murmured blessings, seemed to recall her trembling spirit from the confines of death to the visions of life.

It was with difficulty that, later in the day, Mrs. Neville drew her brother from Ginevra's room, and persuaded him to walk with her for awhile in the fields behind the house where they were staying. It was a calm and lovely evening, and as Edmund Neville raised towards heaven that upward glance, the highest thanksgiving that man can offer to his Creator, he had never before felt so deeply the influence of the silence of nature at her sunset hour. His spirit was wearied with the vicissitudes of fear and hope, of grief and joy, and calmer feelings were beginning to spring up in his heart. His sister and himself wandered along a shady path which lay at the back of the meadow they had crossed, and at the edge of this field they found the trunks of some trees which had been cut down on that spot, and there they sat down to rest. Neither of them at first seemed able to exchange more than a few words, and those were such as had no reference to the past or the future. Both glanced often at the window of Ginevra's room; the subject seemed almost too painful or too sacred for conversation; but Edmund felt that they must not allow any sort of reserve to rise up again between them, and that the sooner they spoke openly and calmly of their relative positions, the better it would be for the future peace of mind and comfort of both. He therefore made an effort over himself, and said, without looking at her—

"Anne, you will not be a hard creditor, I know; and you will even lend me, I am sure, a sum of money with which to begin life again?"

"Is it not too soon to speak of this?" she said with some agitation.

"No," he replied, more calmly and earnestly, "it is better, from the first, to look everything in the face. My future destiny must partly depend on Ginevra's decision, and on the wishes of her family. I know she will never forsake me; but I will not condemn

her to a long banishment, if they can point out any means by which I can honourably maintain her in England or in Italy; but my own wish would be to obtain some employment in America, or to try my fortune as an emigrant in Ceylon or in Australia. I should see my way clearly," he continued, "if it were not for my debts. They are *immense*, but with the assistance I know you will give me, and my own unceasing exertions, I may yet succeed in making my way to independence."

A deep sigh escaped him, and Anne's heart sank within her; she was afraid that selfish regrets had arisen again, and she trembled for him and his new-born virtues; but she was mistaken, and she felt she was, when, after a short pause, he added—

"It is only on her account that I feel anxiety about the future. I have much to expiate; and, bound as she is to me by sacred ties, and by a love which has survived what would have destroyed a common attachment, she may, alas! have much to suffer yet through me and with me; but I cannot, even in that view of the subject, give way to any repinings. I *know her*, for I have tried her, and in the boundless devotion of my whole heart and life, in the new convictions, the new feelings, which have gradually been taking possession of my mind, and which the sufferings of the last few days have, I trust, rivetted with indelible strength, there will be enough, I believe, as firmly as I believe in her truth and virtue, to console her for sharing the fortunes of a ruined, guilty, but deeply repentant husband."

He stopped, and fixed his eyes on the window of Ginevra's room, with an expression which affected his sister. In a few seconds, and with a voice of much emotion, she said—

"I am glad that you have said all this to me, Edmund. Very glad I am that I did not interrupt you. The sentiments and the resolutions which you have just expressed, will be, in future years, a source of satisfaction both to yourself and to me. That you neither thought nor spoke with bitterness on this day; that no selfish or angry feelings have mingled with your thanksgivings for the great blessing which has been granted you, will be remembered by us both as long as we live, and may justly tend to reconcile you with yourself, and renew all the love I felt for you before these miserable trials estranged us from each other. And now, Edmund, listen to me, for I have that to say to you which, in justice to yourself, I withheld till this moment. *One* who may have been misled, but whose intentions towards you were ever kind and just—"

"O Anne, could I have forgiven him, if *she* had died? Now I do from the bottom of my heart."

Anne coloured, and said, with something of indignation in her voice, "It was his reliance in your truth that misled him. He never would believe that his son was capable of deceiving him."

"I know, Anne, that *he* meant well, and that *I* have acted wickedly," Edmund interrupted. "God knows, I have forgiven the injury he has done me! for, do I not myself need the amplest measure of forgiveness?"

Anne continued: "A few days before his death, an anonymous letter was brought to him, which purported to inform him of your secret marriage with Ginevra Leslie."

"It must have been from that wretched Carafelli," exclaimed Edmund. "He alone could have sent it, for he alone knew of my marriage."

"He showed it to none but me," she resumed, "and absolutely refused to believe in the fact. He was certain (he over and over again repeated) that you would never have so deceived him, and it was only a few hours before his death, at my most urgent entreaties, and to satisfy what he considered my unreasonable fears, that he had a codicil secretly drawn up, which, in a certain contingency, (I am now about to explain to you,) rescinded his testamentary sentence of disinheritance. He placed it in my hands, and bound me by a solemn promise never to speak of, or produce it, unless it should hereafter appear that you had already married a Catholic before your return to England, and therefore before the menace which, almost in his last moments, he had announced to you. This he commanded me to use every means in my power secretly to ascertain; for then, and then only, was the prohibitory clause of his will to become void and of no effect. He would have prevented your marriage with a Catholic, at the expense of his life, of his own happiness, and, perhaps, of yours; but deep as was his abhorrence of that creed, he never thought of separating what God had united, and his last act was no impious opposition of his own will to that of Heaven. Now, judge between him and you, and forgive me, if my words have seemed to you stern or cold. Such is not my love for you. Speak to me, brother."

"Anne," said Edmund, at last, as he raised his pale face from between his hands, "I feel now what is meant by heaping coals of fire on an offender's head. *I*, who accused, insulted, and defrauded *you*. Sister, I can scarcely understand or believe what you tell

me." Tears came to his relief, for the violence of his emotion was choking him. After a pause, he took her hand in his, and said in a low voice, "Now, I understand why you and Charles watched me so narrowly. Sister, sister, you may forgive me, but I cannot forgive myself."

He did his sister justice. No common words of thanks passed his lips in that hour, or in any other; but there was that in his heart which no language could have expressed, but which was, nevertheless, conveyed to hers, as if they had been able to read into each other's minds. Her disinterestedness was complete; she looked for no gratitude, and expected no praise; but she had her reward even on earth, in the consciousness that she had not lived in vain—that she had screened her father's memory from reproach and obloquy—that she had secured her brother's peace and comfort, and preserved his reputation. This, with the tender affection he showed her, was her earthly recompense, and in heaven she might, one day, hope to receive the blessing promised to those who seek peace, and ensue it. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God."

With gratitude and with wonder Ginevra learnt the conclusion of their eventful history; but, above all, she rejoiced that Edmund had pressed her to his heart, and called her his wife, before his sister had revealed to him the secret in her possession. He had spoken words that morning which lingered in her ears like a strain of sweet music; words more precious to her than all the codicils, the deeds, and the rent-rolls in the world. In the sanctuary of her heart they remained enshrined, and formed a soothing refuge for memory when too deeply tried by the remembrance of the past.

It was not till many days had elapsed that Edmund was permitted by the physicians to remove his wife from the house where they both had so much suffered. Darrell-court was prepared for their reception, and they proceeded there as soon as letters from abroad had informed them that it was at Grantley Manor, and not in London, that Colonel Leslie wished to meet his daughter. Father Francesco accompanied them to their home, and as he stood by Ginevra on the day of their arrival, and saw her smile as she gazed on its beauty, from the couch on which her husband had placed her, he whispered to her in Italian, "Sorrow endureth for a night; but joy cometh in the morning."

She pressed his hand in silence, and a tear rolled down her cheek. When, a few days later, he took leave of her, on the eve

of his departure for Italy, she begged him to return in the spring, before the acacia blossoms of the Casa Masani should have put forth their snowy wreaths ; but when he answered gravely, " The words of St. Simeon suit me now, my daughter : ' Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace,' is the only request I have to make," a shade of sadness stole over her face ; but when, in another instant, she turned it towards him, there was nothing but peace and joy in its expression, and she said in a low voice : " Father, I feel that we shall soon meet again."

He blessed her, and went on his way, rejoicing that his earthly pilgrimage was drawing to a close, and that a light had been shed on its remaining days, dispersing the clouds which had for a moment so darkly hung over them. The pilgrim's prayer was on his lips, the pilgrim's spirit in his heart, and, before long, the pilgrim's home was his ; and when the spring returned, the acacia trees hung their snowy wreaths over the sod where Father Francesco was laid.

CONCLUSION.

The bells of the parish church were ringing a merry peal, as a travelling carriage drove up the avenue of Grantley Manor, and a group of eager faces were gathered together at the hall-door, where it stopped, to welcome its inmates. Mr. Thornton was there with his gold-headed cane, his extended hand, and his ready smile : his wife was describing what they all felt, till the moment when the door of the carriage was opened, and then she felt too much to describe anything. While Mr. Sydney groaned at the lateness of the hour, and shrugged his shoulders at the innumerable trunks he caught sight of, Mrs. Sydney had retreated into the house, and, pale and breathless, was leaning against the hall window, scarcely able to endure the agitation of that moment. Margaret was in her arms even before her own Walter ; and the tone with which she whispered, as she hung round her neck, "Wish me joy, dearest mother ! I love him, and he loves me more than ever ; and everybody knows it now," gave her one of those rare sensations of joy, which do not often occur in a person's life, for which they feel grateful all the days that they live, and which fill their hearts with a strange surprise and a still stranger happiness. O hope and fear ! and joy and sorrow ! ye are deep and fearful workers in the human soul ; and when ye act on a mother's spirit, ye are terrible in your strength, and wonderful in your power !

"Mrs. Sydney," said Colonel Leslie, as he sat down by her a few moments later, "you have heard, I suppose, that Walter takes charge of the girl whom he spoilt long ago, and that I lose her now, when he can scarcely prize her more than I do."

These were the first words of praise and of affection which Margaret had heard from her father's lips, and the deep flush of joy with which she received, showed how deeply she felt them. After

kissing her dear Mrs. Dalton, and shaking hands with the old servants in the house, she called Walter to her side, and stood with him on the balcony of the drawing-room, gazing on the stately beeches, the rapid river, and the distant muirs of her own home. There had been rain in the morning; the shrubs were still dripping with the plentiful showers; the dahlias and geraniums showed their washed faces, bright and shining, like those of children fresh from their morning ablutions; the horse-chestnuts were shedding their polished fruit on the ground, and the birds were singing their last song—that busy, low twitter among the high branches, which is soon hushed into silence as the shades of night close in. Margaret, absorbed in the beauty of the scene, had been silent for a few minutes, but now she grasped Walter's arm, and pointing to the avenue, she said abruptly—"Here they are!" and reached the entrance-steps as soon as the carriage she had seen. In a moment her sister was in her arms, and each felt, as she clasped the other to her breast, the full tide of sweet and bitter memories, which the place, the hour, the mute embrace, was bringing to their minds.

It was with a strange mixture of feelings that Colonel Leslie received his child and her husband. He folded her to his heart with a painful tenderness and a stern emotion. He had loved her too passionately to be able to look back with calmness to the past; letters had passed between him and Neville; pardon had been asked on the one hand with a frank humility, and granted on the other with a cold reserve. Colonel Leslie's brow darkened, and his voice shook each time that he spoke to his daughter's husband. It was difficult to him to forgive—impossible to forget; but his child was happy, and she loved her husband. By degrees it grew easier to forgive, but still he could not forget; the wound had been too deep, the suffering too recent. It was not till some time afterwards, when Ginevra led him to a spot near Darrell-court, where the first stone of a Catholic chapel was laid, and he read the inscription it bore: "In memorial of an eternal repentance and an eternal gratitude," that his feelings softened towards Edmund Neville. If he could have read into his heart, he would have seen there more of love and of suffering than that memorial stone could record. Margaret and Ginevra were standing once more on the stone terrace of

Grantley Manor; their eyes were fixed on each other, their hands were clasped together, and a long and silent kiss was now and then exchanged between them. They gazed on the distant woods of Darell-court, on the turrets of Heron Castle, and then turned to one another with a sigh or a smile, for their hearts were too full for speech. The troubles, the trials, the mysteries of their lives had passed away, even as a tale that is told; their lot seemed cast in pleasant places, and theirs was a goodly heritage, as far as human foresight could decide. In both their hearts was a trembling sense of gratitude for the haven they had reached; and if Ginevra looked less to this life and more to another—if her hopes and joys were of a more exalted nature, and her aspirations of a higher order than those of her sister, was it strange that it should be so? Had not life shown her depths of misery which inexperience cannot fathom? Had not her spirit hovered on the confines of eternity, and almost taken its wing for the mansions of heaven? She returned to life—to its duties and its blessings; no smile was sweeter than hers, no serenity deeper, and no tenderness more touching; but a seal had been set on her brow, which nothing could efface. Death had been near her, and had left a message for her soul, and the melodies of earth could not overpower that whisper. This was Edmund Neville's trial in the midst of happiness. He ever felt as if an angel was lingering at his side,—as if the links that bound her to life were slender as the threads of the gossamer,—as if she had only been restored to him for a while, to save him from despair and to teach him to repent.

In the old chambers and tapestried halls of Heron Castle, Margaret was like a bright ray of sunshine, gladdening all it touched. She was more idolised than ever by Walter and his parents; she was the pride and the joy of their hearts; the happiest of wives, she soon became the happiest of mothers. A year or two later, at the same window where, in her childish glee, she had so often disturbed Walter from his books, she held a blooming, laughing boy, whose face was as bright and joyous as her own. To a summer morning and to a moonlight night the sisters were once compared. The summer morning is turning to a glorious noon, the moonlight night is waxing brighter each year, but with an un-

earthly light. Fond hearts watch them—a deep love attends them. They are exemplary in their lives, and united in their affections. But life may, ere long, bring forth fresh storms : let us take leave of them, then, while smiles are on their lips, and joy is in their hearts. Let us wish them prosperity, and bid them farewell.

“May their ways be the ways of pleasantness, and all their paths be peace!”

THE END.

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